Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

and

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

Volume 68
(24 October 2011 to 20 November 2011)

BELFAST: THE STATIONERY OFFICE LTD
£70.00

© Copyright 2011
ISBN 978-0-339-80066-3

Table of Contents

Assembly Members i
Principal Officers and Officials of the Assembly ii
Ministerial Offices iii

Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Monday 24 October 2011

Assembly Business
Suspension of Standing Orders 1

Ministerial Statement
Prison Service Review 1

Executive Committee Business
Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 11

Committee Business
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe: Assembly Nominee 15
Committee Membership 15

Private Members' Business
Forensic Science Services 16

Oral Answers to Questions
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister 28
Employment and Learning 35

Private Members' Business
Forensic Science Services *(continued)* 41

Ministerial Statement
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring 42

Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal 50

Tuesday 25 October 2011

Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways 63
North/South Ministerial Council: Language Body 66

Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site 71

Oral Answers to Questions
Education 87
Finance and Personnel 93

Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site *(continued)* 98

Community Pharmacies 102

Adjournment

Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School.....118

Monday 7 November 2011

Assembly Business

Deputy First Minister 129

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Roads and Transport 129

North/South Ministerial Council: Road Safety.....132

Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital 137

Private Members' Business

Pat Finucane Case 149

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment.....155

Enterprise, Trade and Investment.....160

Private Members' Business

Pat Finucane Case *(continued)* 166

Aggregates Levy 175

Tuesday 8 November 2011

Private Members' Business

Petition of Concern: Pat Finucane Case.....189

Ministerial Statement

Dementia Services 190

Private Members' Business

Planning Enforcement.....197

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....207

Justice 213

Private Members' Business

Planning Enforcement *(continued)* 220

Education and Skills Authority 225

Adjournment

Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh.....240

Monday 14 November 2011

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn 247

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment 248

Committee Business

Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections.....255

Private Members' Business

Smoking in Cars Carrying Children.....270

Oral Answers to Questions
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister 273
Regional Development 278

Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development 284

Private Members' Business
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children *(continued)* 287
Prison Review: Final Report 301

Tuesday 15 November 2011

Private Members' Business
Universities: Students' Community Background 323

Oral Answers to Questions
Social Development 342
Culture, Arts and Leisure 348

Private Members' Business
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges 354

Adjournment
Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site 370

Thursday 17 November 2011

Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statement: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy 381
Ministerial Statement: Economic Strategy 398

Written Ministerial Statement

Environment
Extreme Rainfall: Help for Householders ..... WMS 1

Written Answers

Friday 28 October 2011

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ..... WA 1
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development ..... WA 4
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure ..... WA 16
Department of Education ..... WA 23
Department for Employment and Learning ..... WA 38
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment ..... WA 47
Department of the Environment ..... WA 54
Department of Finance and Personnel ..... WA 69
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety ..... WA 77
Department of Justice ..... WA 94
Department for Regional Development ..... WA 102
Department for Social Development ..... WA 115
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission ..... WA 121

Friday 4 November 2011

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ..... WA 125
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development ..... WA 132
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure ..... WA 148
Department of Education ..... WA 163
Department for Employment and Learning ..... WA 171
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment ..... WA 186
Department of the Environment ..... WA 202
Department of Finance and Personnel ..... WA 204
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety ..... WA 209
Department of Justice ..... WA 224
Department for Regional Development ..... WA 231
Department for Social Development ..... WA 246
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission ..... WA 266

Friday 11 November 2011

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ..... WA 269
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development ..... WA 271
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure ..... WA 275
Department of Education ..... WA 277
Department for Employment and Learning ..... WA 282
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment ..... WA 283
Department of the Environment ..... WA 301
Department of Finance and Personnel ..... WA 305
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety ..... WA 306
Department of Justice ..... WA 313
Department for Regional Development ..... WA 320
Department for Social Development ..... WA 330
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission ..... WA 335

Friday 18 November 2011

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ..... WA 339
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development ..... WA 340
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure ..... WA 344
Department of Education ..... WA 359
Department for Employment and Learning ..... WA 368
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment ..... WA 369
Department of the Environment ..... WA 381
Department of Finance and Personnel ..... WA 395
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety ..... WA 395
Department of Justice ..... WA 421
Department for Regional Development ..... WA 428
Department for Social Development ..... WA 436
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission ..... WA 441

Revised Written Answers

Friday 11 November 2011 ..... RWA 1

Official Report (Hansard)

Member's Index.....IDX 1

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Monday 24 October 2011.....MOP 1
Tuesday 25 October 2011.....MOP 7
Monday 7 November 2011.....MOP 13
Tuesday 8 November 2011.....MOP 21
Monday 14 November 2011.....MOP 29
Tuesday 15 November 2011.....MOP 37
Thursday 17 November 2011.....MOP 43

Assembly Members

Agnew, Steven (North Down)
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)
Anderson, Ms Martina (Foyle)
Anderson, Sydney (Upper Bann)
Attwood, Alex (West Belfast)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Bell, Jonathan (Strangford)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)
Boyle, Ms Michaela (West Tyrone)
Bradley, Dominic (Newry and Armagh)
Bradley, Ms Paula (North Belfast)
Brady, Mickey (Newry and Armagh)
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)
Byrne, Joe (West Tyrone)
Campbell, Gregory (East Londonderry)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)
Clarke, Willie (South Down)
Cochrane, Mrs Judith (East Belfast)
Copeland, Michael (East Belfast)
Craig, Jonathan (Lagan Valley)
Cree, Leslie (North Down)
Dallat, John (East Londonderry)
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)
Dobson, Mrs Jo-Anne (Upper Bann)
Doherty, Pat (West Tyrone)
Douglas, Sammy (East Belfast)
Dunne, Gordon (North Down)
Durkan, Mark H (Foyle)
Easton, Alex (North Down)
Eastwood, Colum (Foyle)
Elliott, Tom (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Farry, Dr Stephen (North Down)
Flanagan, Phil (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Ford, David (South Antrim)
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)
Gardiner, Samuel (Upper Bann)
Gildernew, Ms Michelle (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Girvan, Paul (South Antrim)
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)
Hale, Mrs Brenda (Lagan Valley)
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)
Hay, William (Speaker)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)
Humphrey, William (North Belfast)
Hussey, Ross (West Tyrone)
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)
Kennedy, Danny (Newry and Armagh)
Kinahan, Danny (South Antrim)
Lewis, Ms Pam (South Antrim)
Lo, Ms Anna (South Belfast)
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)
Lynch, Seán (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Lyttle, Chris (East Belfast)
McCallister, John (South Down)
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)
McCann, Ms Jennifer (West Belfast)
McCarthy, Kieran (Strangford)
McCartney, Raymond (Foyle)
McCausland, Nelson (North Belfast)
McClarty, David (East Londonderry)
McCrea, Basil (Lagan Valley)
McCrea, Ian (Mid Ulster)
McDevitt, Conall (South Belfast)
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair (South Belfast)
McElduff, Barry (West Tyrone)
McGimpsey, Michael (South Belfast)
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
McGuinness, Martin (Mid Ulster)
McIlveen, David (North Antrim)
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McKay, Daithí (North Antrim)
McKevitt, Mrs Karen (South Down)
McLaughlin, Mitchel (South Antrim)
McMullan, Oliver (East Antrim)
McNarry, David (Strangford)
McQuillan, Adrian (East Londonderry)
Maginness, Alban (North Belfast)
Maskey, Alex (South Belfast)
Maskey, Paul (West Belfast)
Molloy, Francie (Mid Ulster)
Morrow, The Lord (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Moutray, Stephen (Upper Bann)
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)
Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
Ó hOisín, Cathal (East Londonderry)
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
Overend, Mrs Sandra (Mid Ulster)
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Ramsey, Pat (Foyle)
Ramsey, Ms Sue (West Belfast)
Ritchie, Ms Margaret (South Down)
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Robinson, Peter (East Belfast)
Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)
Ruane, Ms Caitríona (South Down)
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)
Spratt, Jimmy (South Belfast)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)
Weir, Peter (North Down)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

Principal Officers and Officials of the Assembly

Speaker	Mr William Hay MLA
Principal Deputy Speaker	Mr Francie Molloy MLA
Deputy Speakers	Mr Roy Beggs MLA Mr John Dallat MLA
Clerk to the Assembly/Director-General	Mr Trevor Reaney
Director of Clerking and Reporting	Mr John Stewart
Director of Corporate Services	Mr Richard Stewart
Director of Facilities/Keeper of the House	Mr Stephen Welch
Director of Information and Outreach	Dr Gareth McGrath
Director of Legal and Governance Services	Mr Hugh Widdis
Examiner of Statutory Rules	Mr Gordon Nabney
Adviser to the Speaker	Mr Robin Ramsey
Clerk Assistants	Ms Nuala Dunwoody Mr Damien Martin
Editor of Debates	Mr Simon Burrowes
Clerk to the Assembly Commission	Mr Tony Logue

Ministerial Offices

The Executive Committee

First Minister	Mr Peter Robinson
Deputy First Minister	Mr Martin McGuinness *(from 31 October 2011)*
Acting deputy First Minister	Mr John O'Dowd *(until 31 October 2011)*
Minister for Employment and Learning	Dr Stephen Farry
Minister for Regional Development	Mr Danny Kennedy
Minister for Social Development	Mr Nelson McCausland
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	Mrs Michelle O'Neill
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure	Ms Carál Ní Chuilín
Minister of Education	Mr John O'Dowd
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Mrs Arlene Foster
Minister of Finance and Personnel	Mr Sammy Wilson
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	Mr Edwin Poots
Minister of Justice	Mr David Ford
Minister of the Environment	Mr Alex Attwood

Junior Ministers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	Ms Martina Anderson Mr Jonathan Bell

Official Report
(Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 24 October 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Suspension of Standing Orders

Mr Speaker: I wish to advise the House that I have received notice from Mr Weir and Lord Morrow of a motion under Standing Order 10(3A) to extend the sitting beyond 7.00 pm. The Question on the motion will be put without debate.

Mr Weir: I beg to move

> *That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 24 October 2011 be extended to no later than 7.30 pm.*

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

> *That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 24 October 2011 be extended to no later than 7.30 pm.*

Mr Speaker: The motion has been agreed, and the House may sit until 7.30 pm if necessary.

Ministerial Statement

Prison Service Review

Mr Speaker: The Minister of Justice wishes to make a statement.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With permission, I wish to inform the House of the publication today of the final report of the prison review team, chaired by Dame Anne Owers. I welcome that report, which will form the cornerstone of a radical programme of reform in our prison system. Members will recall that I established the prison review team in July 2010 to conduct a review of the conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons in Northern Ireland. I want to extend my thanks to Dame Anne Owers and her colleagues Paul Leighton, Clodach McGrory, Fergus McNeill and Phil Wheatley for their painstaking work over the past 16 months and for the vast range of expertise that they have brought to the issue.

In February 2011, the review team published an interim report that set a very clear direction of travel for the Prison Service and identified the need for significant improvements in governance, leadership, working practices and culture. In short, it highlighted the need for end-to-end, fundamental reform of the Prison Service. The team's final report includes 40 recommendations for fundamental reform. All of them will require careful consideration, and I will, of course, wish to discuss them further with the Justice Committee and with my colleagues in the Executive. In reaching those recommendations, the report expands on many of the themes and issues signalled by the earlier report and sets out a vision of a prison system that provides secure custody; supports and reflects human rights standards and ethical values; is based on the premise that prisoners within it can develop and change and provides

the opportunities for them to do so; and shows that it is using and investing public money wisely. Reflecting that vision, it details the fundamental characteristics that our prisons should display. The vision set out and the characteristics described provide a model against which I want our prison system of the future and the reform programme we are setting in place to take us there to be judged. Along with the director general of the Prison Service, I am fully committed to the transformation of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) into a service that reflects the model set out in the report.

The report not only looks forward but looks at where we are now. Any thorough and robust review of our prison system was inevitably going to make for uncomfortable reading, as many others have in recent years. This report is no exception. One of the most disturbing aspects of the report relates to the differentials that have been identified in the outcomes for various groups of prisoner, including, for example, trends of more Catholic prisoners on the basic regime or subject to multiple adjudications. The director general and I take those findings very seriously. We are clear that there are no grounds on which discrimination or preferential treatment because of religion, ethnicity or nationality will be tolerated. Although we will examine what further steps may be required to ensure that they are addressed, we have already agreed that a number of immediate steps will be taken.

It is evident that, although information on equality and diversity issues has been gathered, it has not been sufficient nor has it been used appropriately to safeguard equality of treatment and opportunity across all groups of prisoners. The director general has, therefore, issued clear instructions to the governing governors to ensure that equality and diversity information is properly examined and analysed and immediate corrective action taken where there is no clear rationale for apparent inequality of treatment. Steps are also being taken to ensure that, in future, the role of equality and diversity committees in each prison will be given proper priority and chaired at an appropriately senior level, with attendance from prisoners. The director general will report to me personally on how that issue is being addressed. Moreover, within the Department's responsibilities, I have instructed officials to amend the departmental equality action plan, which was being made ready for publication, to include actions in relation to that issue. That will provide an additional level of monitoring and direct reporting to me as Minister.

The review team has expressed frustration that outcomes for prisoners remain largely unchanged since the publication of its interim report in February. The team identifies a number of reasons for that and highlights the lengthy processes of procurement and recruitment and the need for cross-departmental approvals, as well as the lengthy negotiations about an early retirement scheme. The team concludes that all of those protracted processes have reduced momentum and increased frustration. Summing up their own frustration, the members of the review team express their:

> *"fears that our review, like others, will result in a report, but no fundamental change."*

They argue, rightly, that that must not happen, and I agree. They say:

> *"Though the transformation we envisage will take time to complete, there is an urgent need to show that its foundations are securely in place. The next six months will be crucial."*

Again, I agree. With that in mind, rather than try to respond to a report of this importance in a single statement, I intend to make a number of statements and announcements during those next six months, setting out in greater detail the work that is already under way and how we intend to build on that work as we seek to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

We are reaching a point where, as a result of work that has been continuing behind the scenes over the last year, I am confident we will soon see a step change in the pace of the reform programme. While expressing the team's disappointment at progress to date, the report also acknowledges that there is a sense of change and purpose at the top of the Prison Service. The review team says that there is no doubt that those responsible for the prison system recognise the size and shape of the problem and have been working hard to find solutions for it. That hard work to lay the foundations for fundamental change may not yet have been evidenced in visible improvements to prisoner outcomes, but I want to reassure Members that much has been achieved, laying the groundwork for structural change in this first year of the programme and for fundamental changes to culture and practice in due course.

As a result of that work, there are early signs of improvements to outcomes for prisoners and real and practical enhancements to the experience of offenders in custody. The development of the Donard day centre at Maghaberry, which I will formally open next month, is transforming how we manage, support and care for the most vulnerable prisoners. The governor has recently introduced a new system of free-flow movement for all category C prisoners in Maghaberry, with plans in place to extend those arrangements to category B prisoners. The introduction of that system starts to address the report's cautions about over-reliance on physical security and the need to move towards more dynamic security arrangements across the prison system, with benefits including greater efficiency and enhanced personal responsibility for prisoners. Across all three establishments, the recent introduction of central detailing, as the report notes, has resulted in a more consistent regime and noticeably fewer lockdowns.

In the report, the review team has scoped out the sheer scale of the change that is needed. It is clear that lasting and effective reform on this scale will take time. We cannot expect fundamental change to happen overnight. The report refers to the strategic effectiveness and efficiency (SEE) programme and describes it as:

> *"to a large extent consistent with the perceptions and recommendations"*

made in the interim report. I have compared the scale of the SEE programme with that of the Patten reforms of policing. Indeed, we know from that experience that the process of delivering fundamental and lasting organisational change on such a scale takes years. The SEE programme is a four-year change programme, and the NIPS four-year corporate plan, published this month, sets out how change will be achieved across each year of that programme.

The work to date on year 1 structural change has included the development of a new business operating model for the Prison Service that will transform and modernise working practices; the development of new roles for NIPS front line staff; and reviews of non-core functions to examine possible opportunities to improve existing service delivery. The past eight months have seen the reinforcement of governance arrangements across the service, including the restructuring of Prison Service headquarters. Governors in charge now report directly to the director general on operational performance matters. As the review team has acknowledged, along with other initiatives such as central detailing, the new emphasis on accountability is delivering a demonstrably more predictable regime and is beginning to have a positive effect on prisoner outcomes.

The report makes some very interesting and thoughtful recommendations about the size and shape of the prison estate in the future. It recommends a quite radical reconfiguration of the Maghaberry site into three mini-prison areas and presses for a clear decision on the role and future of Magilligan prison. It also recommends the development of new halfway house and step-down accommodation for long-sentenced prisoners and those with mental health and substance use issues. Those recommendations will be considered in full in the estates strategy, about which I will make a further statement in the months ahead.

In relation to the size of the prison estate, the report makes a number of recommendations aimed at reducing the number of people being sent to prison, especially on remand, including tackling delay; identifying alternatives to custody for fine defaulters; and reinforcing the view that custody should only ever be a last resort. Those are, of course, matters for the wider justice system rather than our Prison Service, and, although more must be done, we should not understate the scale of change that is already happening across the justice system. The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, enacted in May this year, makes provision for alternatives to prosecution, including penalty notices and conditional cautions. I have also brought forward considerable work to address fine default, which the report has also highlighted as a barrier to progress, reform and a reduction in offending. The pilot of a new community-based alternative to custody for fine default — the supervised activity order to which the report refers — will commence in the Craigavon area before the end of the year.

12.15 pm

Our programme of work to tackle delay in the system includes streamlining and improving existing processes and procedures, as well as looking to the future and more fundamental structural and legislative reform. The review team has gone further in the report than

previously by recommending the implementation of statutory time limits from arrest to disposal, staged over three years. I am already considering a related recommendation arising from the recently published review of youth justice, and it is significant that Dame Anne has added her voice to the debate. I am giving careful consideration to such an initiative and will return to it in due course.

The review team devotes a chapter of the report to the particular needs of women and young adults in our system. The team identifies successful programmes for women, such as the Inspire project, and recommends those as models on which to build. However, it also highlights the weaker aspects of our provision and makes innovative recommendations for a new custodial facility. It applies similar innovation to young adults and recommends the transformation of Hydebank Wood into a secure college. It also adds its voice to that of those who have strongly advised us to end the detention of under-18s at that establishment. All those recommendations deserve further detailed consideration, and, again, they will be the subject of further announcements by me in the coming months.

Of critical importance throughout the report is the recognition that our prison system does not exist and operate in a vacuum but is an essential part of society and only one of many agents that contribute to the creation of a safer society through the reduction of offending. That is immediately evident in the provision of healthcare in prisons, where responsibility for commissioning healthcare has transferred from NIPS to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The review team commissioned two independent reviews of the delivery of those services, and those are also being published today. The overall conclusion of the review team is that, although progress has been made, much more is required. The team makes detailed recommendations about the governance structure for the delivery of healthcare and for improvements to the relationship between healthcare and the wider criminal justice system. Obviously, the consideration of those conclusions and recommendations will fall to me and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

The report also emphasises that responsibility for driving forward change towards an effective prison system reaches across the entire justice system and beyond to become the responsibility of the entire Executive. The rehabilitation and successful reintegration of offenders into society cannot fall solely to NIPS. The report touches on issues of health, employability, learning and skills, and on the many other social and economic barriers to and springboards for changed behaviour and desistance from offending.

At an operational level, success will rely on the development by NIPS of effective partnership work with other agencies and communities. The Prison Service already enjoys positive working relationships with a number of other agencies and organisations, particularly the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. I am also aware of the director general's determination that NIPS will develop a more outward-facing approach by working more effectively with existing partners and seeking out and developing new relationships.

For my part, I am determined to join up our response to offending at a strategic level among Departments. The report is explicit:

> *"Everyone who wants to live in a safer and more peaceful society has a stake in successfully reintegrating ex-prisoners; so everyone should play their part in making reintegration happen."*

Similarly, the point is made:

> *"There is virtually no department in the devolved administration that does not have an interest in, and a need to contribute to, the reduction of crime."*

I am committed to developing and delivering a reshaped Executive-wide approach to reducing offending. The review refers to such an approach as a "safer society strategy".

Members will appreciate that the report is a far-reaching one that challenges all of us to embrace the urgent need for fundamental reform. I hope that all sides of the House will do so. As we do so, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Northern Ireland Prison Service is an operational service that provides custody, services and interventions to offenders 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The pressure on that service to deliver the programme of change that we demand, on top of its ongoing operational responsibilities, will be intense. Through the SEE programme, the strategy for moving forward has been put in place. I now look to colleagues in the Executive, the Justice Committee and the wider Assembly to lend their weight and support

to making the strategy happen. NIPS needs to be empowered and supported in starting the journey towards change.

As I have said, I share the review team's assessment that the next six-month period is crucial. Indeed, it is a watershed for the Prison Service. With colleagues' support, I am confident that we will pass a number of critical milestones, including the announcement of an exit scheme aimed at right-sizing the service and refreshing the workforce; the appointment of a dedicated change programme team, the selection programme for which is nearing completion; a comprehensive new business operating model to transform totally how NIPS works, which will be in place and ready for launch by April 2012; radical changes to healthcare, with healthcare staff scheduled to transfer to the South Eastern Trust by April 2012; completion of reviews of the provision of non-core functions, such as learning and skills, catering and estate management; publication of a revised prison estate strategy that will set out how the prison estate will be developed, taking account of the recommendations in the review team's report; and further changes across the wider justice system, including outcomes of the review of community sentences.

In closing, I repeat the challenge that has been set before us by the review team when it reminds us:

> *"this is a unique opportunity to create a public sector prison system that is a model of excellence".*

Dame Anne also said:

> *"incremental improvements are not enough, and there needs to be a determined cross-party approach to driving through the whole package of change."*

I seek the support of the Assembly for the work that will need to be done by the Prison Service, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and other Departments and agencies to meet that challenge.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Minister for bringing the report and the statement to the House. Most people will agree that we should be trying to reduce offending, that we should do so efficiently and effectively and that we should try to reform and rehabilitate those prisoners who can be engaged in the system. In the coming months, the Committee will go through the report in more detail.

There will be areas that we can support and others that we will find difficult to support, particularly the recommendation that suggests the automatic release of prisoners who are held in remand for more than one year. The report recommends that they should get automatic bail. Minister, I ask you to rule that out as an option, because taking that proposal forward would only further erode public confidence in the justice system. Sixty people would be entitled to that, including some who face the serious charge of murder. We want to ensure that that does not happen, and I ask the Minister to deal with that issue.

How does the Minister intend to deal with prolific offenders who do not engage in the system and do not exhibit any potential for reformation? The public see that a deterrent value is needed through strong sentences and a robust regime in the prison so that they do not do it again. That aspect does not seem to be in the report.

Lastly, Minister, your previous report on the youth justice review was put out for a full public consultation. Given the low public confidence in the effectiveness of the justice and prison systems, would it not be wise to put this report out to public consultation to allow ordinary members of the public to have their say on how the prison system should be run in future?

Mr Ford: I welcome the Chair's opening remarks about the areas that he expected the Committee to support. Let me talk about what he described as automatic bail. Speeding up justice has been one of my key priorities for the past 18 months, and it is clear that a certain amount of progress has been made. I get regular reports of improved working relationships between the Police Service and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), and active case management is being carried out by members of the judiciary. However, we have not yet seen the step change in dealing with the delay, whereby cases in Northern Ireland may take two years or more to come to court that, in GB, would perhaps take a few months. Therefore, we need to be cautious before we suggest that nothing of that sort should be considered. The recommendation from the team of a three-year phasing for the possible introduction of that would, in its terms, send

out the message that something will have to be put in place to ensure that change happens; otherwise, it is too easy to say that change will not happen.

There are serious issues about dangerous offenders not being released from custody, but Mr Givan should not have any fear that, on the basis of the report, we are about to remove immediately some of the most dangerous prisoners from custody. However, it is an issue that, alongside other reports, will need to be taken into account. Similar issues were raised in the youth justice review. He talked about protecting society from prolific offenders. The sad reality is that society at the moment does not seem to be protected from prolific offenders merely by sending them to prison if they are prolific offenders once they return. We need to see what would work to make a difference to prolific offenders.

The Member should also take account of the fact that this is a very different review from the youth justice review with regard to consultation. The youth justice review sought responses from the public on different ways of looking at how we work to best meet the needs of young people in danger of running into difficulty and ensure that society is properly protected. The present review is much more an operational issue. In that context, it fits well with the work being done by Prison Service management under the SEE programme. Frankly, to suggest that we should have a period of extended consultation would, I believe, be damaging given the need to get these fundamental reforms under way, as has been highlighted by Dame Anne and her team.

Mr Speaker: Just before I call Raymond McCartney, I say to the whole House that, as Members rise to ask the Minister a question about his statement, I can understand that, given the nature of the statement, Members might be tempted to deliver further statements as they deliberate on their question. Quite a number of Members want to ask a question, but I warn Members to be more focused on the question that they want to ask the Minister.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas inniu agus le foireann na bpríosún as a gcuid oibre.

I thank the Minister for his statement. I also thank the prison review team led by Dame Anne Owers for its work and, indeed, the publication of the report this morning. I think we all know that this has been a comprehensive piece of work. If it can be distilled into a sentence or two, then it is about change — not only change but how that change can be realised. I say to the Minister that change will come about only if the process of change is monitored and examined on a consistent and constant basis.

The Minister said:

> *"we seek to implement the recommendations contained in the report."*

I hope that the Minister will agree with me that recommendations 22 and 23 around oversight and implementation are crucial. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that that process is put in place as soon as possible?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McCartney for his welcome, although he managed to catch me out ever so slightly by saving the specific reference until the end. Clearly, oversight of the change is fundamental. The specific issue, for example, of a ministerial group, which would include membership from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI), will, perhaps, need to be discussed with Dr Maguire as to how he sees the appropriate role for CJINI within that. However, I accept the principle of what Mr McCartney is saying whilst I cannot give an absolute guarantee of the precise wording of recommendations 22 and 23.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Speaker, I shall do my best, given the comprehensive nature of the report. The Minister repeatedly said in his statement that he thinks the responsibility rests with the Executive and other Members of the Assembly. I suspect that many members of the public will be shocked by some of the issues put forward here. That is not to say they are not right. However, will the Minister tell me what support he expects to get from his Executive colleagues and how he seeks to reassure the public that the recommendations in the report are for the benefit of us all?

Mr Ford: The important thing is that people should not cherry-pick or read small sections of the report but look at the overall issue of the report. It is a measured package which identifies the need for fundamental reforms and sets out some of those proposals. In that sense, I hope that Members of the House and the Executive will read the report and take it on that basis before they comment on it, rather

than, as perhaps has sometimes been known to happen in the Great Hall of this Building, rushing immediately in front of a microphone to give off about a small section of it. In that sense, we can ensure that we get public support because, I think, the public are well aware of the difficulties that the Prison Service faces and the need for some of those fundamental reforms.

He referred to Executive support and responsibility. When I go to Maghaberry next month to formally open the Donard day-care facility for vulnerable prisoners, I will do so in conjunction with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I will also look at the new learning and skills centre in conjunction with the Minister for Employment and Learning. At the very least, that is an indication of three Departments working together and of two Departments that have fundamental responsibilities for supporting the work of the Prison Service fully co-operating at ministerial level.

12.30 pm

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his statement, and I congratulate Dame Anne Owers and her team for producing a very good report that will bring about fundamental reform of the prison system. I also welcome the Minister's very positive approach to the report and assure him that this side of the House will support his implementation of it.

I want to ask specifically about the so-called exit package for serving prison officers. Will the Minister reassure the House that that package will be linked specifically with a radical improvement in working practices in the Prison Service? Without that, the exit package will be worthless.

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for his very positive words, and I have no doubt that Dame Anne and her team will appreciate the fact that some people have read the report and fully support it. The specific issue of the exit package is linked in the report to the refreshment of prison staffing, and it talks about the need for retraining for those who remain in post and for new prison staff who come into post. Mr Maginness correctly highlights the joined-up nature of that, although, in sheer chronology, the opportunity to develop the exit strategy at an early stage will be necessary in order to free up the resources that will then allow the ongoing work with new and existing members of staff.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister, welcome the report, and thank its authors and the Department. With an energetic Minister of Justice at the helm, I have no doubt that the contents of the report will be vigorously enacted as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: I hope that there is going to be a question here.

Mr McCarthy: Recently, the Minister has received a number of reports, including from Criminal Justice Inspection, the youth justice review team and, today, the prison review team, all of which recommend that the practice of detaining under-18s at Hydebank should end. Can the Minister outline what progress is being made on that recommendation and can he categorically clarify that there is no recommendation in the report for the automatic release of prisoners who have been held on remand for 12 months?

Mr Ford: I will leave out my energy and enthusiasm; after the weekend, I am not sure how much there is. I can certainly clarify that although the report highlights the issue about moving towards addressing the question of a statutory time limit, it does not make any formal direction in that sense, and I have indicated that we are keeping that issue under review.

My colleague highlights a very serious issue that is raised frequently: the detention at Hydebank Wood of those who are not yet 18. My understanding when I checked the figures last week was that there were only eight under-18s in Hydebank Wood in the course of the past year. As a result of initiatives by the Youth Justice Agency, the staff of Woodlands and others, and the Prison Service, 12 under-18s who were committed by courts to Hydebank Wood have been referred back to the courts on the basis of the assessment that they would be better transferred to the juvenile justice centre at Woodlands. That is an indication that positive work is being done, although I have no doubt that the long-term issues of resolving how we deal with the most difficult young people if we are using only Woodlands will mean that there will be a bit of problem in the years to come. However, the fact that we have seen such a reduction in numbers is an indication of the good work being done by the Youth Justice Agency with the Prison Service.

Mr Weir: Judging by the last question, it is just as well that brown-nosing is not a criminal

offence or else Mr McCarthy might be looking for an early release. We all accept that there needs to be swifter actions around remand issues. For instance, the reforms of PIs and PEs need to be looked at, and we may even need to go further on that. Does the Minister accept that implementing the statutory time limits in recommendation 2 would mean automatic release? I am not clear on the response that he gave earlier. Will he take this opportunity to say that he will not accept that recommendation in its totality and that there will not be statutory time limits, or is he simply saying that those will be phased in over time?

Mr Ford: As I said, that recommendation must be taken extremely seriously, bearing in mind that it also features in other reports. It is not something that will happen tomorrow nor is there any guarantee that it will not happen ever.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the Minister's statement and the report. I was glad to hear him particularly welcome the fact that a whole package of measures is needed rather than some incremental changes. Given the resistance to change in some quarters, will the Minister assure the House today that the independent monitoring of outcomes will be given priority when he is taking the report's recommendations forward?

Mr Ford: I give Ms McCann that assurance. It was a matter of considerable concern to see the differential outcome in statistics, and we do not know the full reason behind it. Dame Anne highlighted in a communication today that it is unclear why the statistics would suggest differential outcomes between Catholics and Protestants. She told me that the evidence does not provide conclusive proof of discrimination, but it certainly points to persistent differences, which will be taken as a priority by the director general of the Prison Service and by me to ensure that we get to the bottom of it.

Mr Campbell: I, too, welcome the Minister's statement. He will no doubt be aware of the long-running campaign to ensure that Magilligan prison is reconstructed. Some colleagues and I met with him several months ago, and he is aware that a predecessor of his — direct rule Minister Paul Goggins — gave specific assurances, as did the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of the Westminster House of Commons. Given that recommendations 4 and 6 suggest that it would be better to build a new prison near a centre of population — I assumed that we had one called Maghaberry, which is near Belfast — can he assure us that the Magilligan rebuild will begin as soon as possible, regardless of the interim and final reports, and that whatever has to be done to provide a new prison there, in whatever system is needed, will be done as a matter of urgency?

Mr Ford: I am unable to give any assurance when the estates review is still under way. The report correctly highlights the fact that there are issues around Magilligan, which has some good accommodation and some poor. The report also highlights issues relating to geography. Those matters are being taken on board by the estates review, and I expect to report to the House when that review comes to fruition.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister share my grave concern that 74% of prisoners at basic privilege level in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre are Catholic, 66% of prisoners in Maghaberry prison at basic privilege level are Catholic and eight out of 10 prisoners in Magilligan prison at basic privilege level are Catholic?

Mr Ford: Mr Speaker, I thought I made it clear, in response to Ms McCann's question if nothing else, that I share those concerns. The problem is that we have not identified the reasons why, and more work needs to be done to ascertain the exact reasons behind that situation and how we will deal with it. If I did not make clear in my statement that this is being taken as a very significant priority by the director general and by me, I repeat it now.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his statement and very much welcome the many recommendations in the report. The Minister mentioned a new custodial facility for women at Hydebank, which is in my constituency, and I agree that a new facility is needed. Does he agree that the strategy for women prisoners must involve more than just buildings? We need to take the right approach to the care and rehabilitation of women prisoners.

Mr Ford: Yes, I agree entirely with the words of the report, repeated by my colleague, that say that the strategy for women has to be about much more than buildings. Since I became Minister, I have spoken on a number of occasions in the Chamber about visiting the Inspire Women's Project, which is run by the Probation Board with support from a number of NGOs and which

liaises with the Prison Service. The project deals with those who are in danger of going to prison and those who are being rehabilitated after serving prison sentences. It is absolutely clear that, similar to others across the water, that project is having positive effects on the women that it deals with. It is also very clear that we need to address urgently how we find an appropriate facility — probably a relatively low-security custodial facility — for a very small number of people and alternative community provision for those women who do not require it. One of the tragedies of our system is that, at the moment, over 50% of women admitted to Hydebank Wood go there for a few days for things such as fine default. I cannot see how that can be maintained into the long term as a rational way either of meeting the needs of that group of people or of protecting society.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement in which he referred to Patten. He will be aware that pivotal to the downsizing of the Police Service was the important element that the staff associations were brought along fully in the negotiation of an exit package. Will he assure the House that the Prison Officers' Association (POA) will be fully involved in any scheme or negotiations on either downsizing or an exit package?

Mr Ford: I assure the House that not only will the POA be fully included but there have been ongoing regular discussions with POA representatives about the exit scheme and other aspects of ongoing work. The association will continue to be fully involved in those discussions.

Mr Eastwood: Page 49 of the report states:

> *"This is a whole package, not a series of incremental changes."*

Given that, does the Minister agree that recommendations 22 to 28 should be implemented in full?

Mr Ford: If Mr McCartney catches me out by throwing in two recommendations at the last minute, I am certainly not responding to eight, or however many it was. I made it clear that I accept the thrust of the report. That does not mean to say that the Prison Service can give an absolute guarantee of every individual issue. I will give one example. There is criticism that supervised activity orders are going ahead only as a pilot in one area and somewhat late. There are operational and organisational reasons why that is the case, but I accept fully the necessity to develop supervised activity orders as fast as can be. However, I cannot accept the precise wording of that recommendation. Mr Eastwood and others can be assured that the Department of Justice accepts the report as a principle for the way forward without necessarily accepting the precise timescales or wordings of every aspect of it.

Mr Allister: The Minister began his statement by paying lip service to the need to give careful consideration to all the recommendations. He then immediately jumped in to damn the existing Prison Service, getting particularly exercised by the fact that there are more Catholics than Protestants facing adjudications in the prisons but ignoring the reality that, for whatever reason, there are more Catholic than Protestant prisoners. Is the Minister's response not indicative of the fact that he has already made up his mind about all those matters and about a report that is somewhat divorced from reality by virtue of the sparse reference, and the total absence of reference in his statement, to the compelling reality that our prisons still contain a significant coterie of dangerous terrorist prisoners?

12.45 pm

Mr Ford: I find it difficult to see how anybody could describe my statement this morning as jumping in "to damn the existing Prison Service". I have recognised the positive sides of what has been done by the Prison Service and what needs to be done to bring it up to date. I think that Mr Allister and others need to be sure that we do not manage the Prison Service, which currently has something in the region of 1,600 prisoners, on the basis of the needs for managing approximately 60.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement this morning and the review team for its comprehensive report. I am disappointed that we did not get the report until 9·30 am today. The review team expressed its frustration at the lack of change since the interim report back in February. Can the Minister assure the House that the final report will not end up causing similar frustration?

Mr Ford: I am sorry that Mr Lynch is upset about receiving the report at 9·30 am today. I am aware of similar things in the past when

a Minister's statement appeared a bare hour before the Minister stood up, and a report did not appear until the statement in question was over. Consistent with the fact that the report was received in the Department of Justice on Wednesday, and after a lot of work was done by my officials over the weekend, I sought to ensure that we got it out as fast as possible this morning.

Mr Lynch talks about progress. I acknowledge that there is a degree of disappointment in the report as to what has happened. On the other hand, we have seen a number of significant things happen since the publication of the interim report. We have had the launch of the SEE programme, and work has been done on centralised detailing, which, as I said, has resulted in far fewer lockdowns than last summer, for example. Furthermore, the business case for the staff exit scheme is being discussed in great detail with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP); there has been ongoing work with the Prison Officers' Association on agreeing new roles for front line staff, alongside new grading, and so on; and there is an ongoing review, which I outlined earlier, on the prisons estate strategy. Of course, the Prison Service also has significant involvement in the proposals for the integrated college at Desertcreat. Work is also being done on strengthening corporate governance within prison headquarters and with regard to the relationships between the three prisons and the director general. Therefore, although there has been less to show than, perhaps, we might have hoped, we should not suggest that that means that nothing has been happening since February.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for his statement. I am sure that he will agree that whatever happens in the Northern Ireland Prison Service in the future, we must have a prison system that commands the confidence of the public and ensures public safety. I am concerned that the prison officers who are facing redundancies will get a fair deal. Can the Minister elaborate on his plans for what he has described as the exit scheme? Can he assure me that prison officers will be treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve? Can he also assure me that they will be given a financial package in recognition of the job that they did for 30 years of the Troubles, when they and their families suffered greatly, and not the package that is under consideration, which, to them, serves only to add insult to injury?

Mr Ford: With respect, I do not think that either Mr Anderson or the members of the Prison Officers' Association know the detail of the package, which is being discussed by DOJ and DFP. While the discussion on that business case is going forward, I am not in a position to elaborate on it. I can assure him and others that we are seeking to treat prison officers with dignity, recognising the conditions in which many of the long-serving staff worked but also recognising the need for the fundamental reforms that the team has talked about.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his statement. With reference to:

> *"statutory time limits from arrest to disposal",*

what issues is the Minister considering? When does he intend to come back to us? What does he mean by "in due course"?

Mr Ford: It is becoming a little bit sad that although Members have every right to ask any question that they want on a statement on the fundamental reform of the Prison Service, they seem to be asking more about time limits than they are about prisons. We had something the same when we were discussing youth justice a while ago. I sometimes wonder whether, collectively, the Assembly can get its head around the big issues, or whether it is easier to concentrate on trifles. The answer to the question about time limits is that they are under consideration because of issues in the youth justice review and some ongoing work by the criminal justice delivery group. They will remain under review, and announcements will be made when they can be made.

Lord Morrow: The Minister's earlier statement reads more like a criminals' charter than anything else. The report has the whiff of Patten about it, and it strikes me that it has more to do with the comforts of prisoners than looking after victims. If the Minister is to take the report forward in its current form, does he accept that it is incumbent on him to ensure that the public have confidence in it? Does he also accept that victims, in particular, should not be undermined as a result of the changes that he proposes to make in the future?

Mr Ford: I do not think that I read anything in the report about the comforts of prisoners. However, I did read a lot about the effective rehabilitation and reform of prisoners. We really need to get our heads around what works in

making this society safer. To suggest that a detailed report, which was prepared by five people with significant expertise in the justice system, human rights and dealing with prisoners in practical ways, could somehow be dismissed as giving comfort to prisoners shows a rather sad lacking of the necessities in this society.

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I beg to move

> *That the draft Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.*

These regulations are made under section 27 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which stipulates that they must be laid in draft form and approved by a resolution of the Assembly. As required by section 44 of that Act, the draft regulations were issued for consultation from December 2010 to February 2011.

In essence, the changes are strictly technical in nature. They will have no material impact on the amount of grant aid that goes to the relevant councils that qualify under the regulations. There are some name changes as a consequence of the regulations. However, the old regime endures, and it will govern what moneys are or are not paid, subject to the criteria, to those councils that qualify for a rates support grant.

From 1 April 2012, the rates support grant will replace the resources element of the general grant that is paid to councils. At present, there are two elements under the general grant: a rates support grant and a derating grant. Under the new regulations, those elements will be separated, and there will a derating payment and a resources payment. That is the essence of what is before the Assembly today.

The regulations bring forward the statutory formula that is used to calculate the distribution of the resources element of the general grant and apply it to the rates support grant. The formula, however, remains unaltered. The formula measures each council's wealth base against its needs. A council's wealth is based on the value of all rateable and derated properties in its district. A council's needs are determined by adjusting the population estimate for the district to take account of three factors that are based on the NI multiple deprivation measure: socio-economic disadvantage; the impact of an influx of population into a district; and sparsity. The grant is paid only to those councils whose needs exceed their wealth.

The overall funding that is available for the grant is then shared out in proportion to the need, as determined by the formula. Under the provisions, in the current year, seven councils will receive zero grant, and as a consequence and based on the criteria that I just referred to, 19 councils will receive varied levels of grant.

The provision in the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 for the rates support grant differs in two key respects from the previous provision in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 2002 for the resources element of the general grant. The first difference is that the amount of rates support grant payable to councils will be protected from cuts during the financial year. I hope that that will be very much welcomed, given the adverse circumstances that our communities and some councils face going forward. Although there will be no impact on the regulations, that was the main concern that was raised during consultation on the draft regulations. I hope that those who raised issues on that matter are reassured.

The second difference affects the regulations, as the Department now has the power to issue a determination specifying the information that is needed from councils to calculate the grant. That removes the need for a pro forma to be prescribed in regulations, meaning that technical changes in accounting practices that do not affect the formula can be taken forward by administrative means rather than through regulations that are subject to draft affirmative procedure. In other words, that is a matter of process that enables the intention of rates support to be facilitated somewhat more easily.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the chair)

Those two changes improve on the previous arrangements by streamlining the information-gathering process and by providing councils that receive the rates support grant with a protected, consistent source of funding during the year.

I ask the Assembly to approve the draft regulations.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): The Committee considered initial proposals for these regulations at its meeting on 22 September 2011, when members were content for the Department to proceed with the policy. The Committee subsequently had sight of the draft rule on 29 September and agreed to recommend that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

As we heard, the rule sets out the formula that the Department is to use to calculate the amount of rates support grant payable to councils. From April 2012, the rates support grant will replace the resources element of the general grant but the formula for its calculation will remain the same. The regulations are in accordance with overarching primary legislation, that is, the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which the previous Committee spent some time scrutinising towards the end of the previous mandate.

I remind the House of two particular issues that were raised in connection with the rates support grant. First, although members were content with the formula as it stood under existing council arrangements, the Committee stressed that it must be reviewed when the council structures are reformed. Members were content that until such a rearrangement takes place, the central statistics and research branch will carry out an annual equality monitoring exercise on the resources element of the grant.

Secondly, the previous Committee was deeply concerned about future resourcing of council grants. The resources element of the general grant, which will become the new rates support grant, provides additional resources to councils whose wealth falls below the Northern Ireland average. Members recognised that any cuts to that grant would reduce resources in those areas even further and might lead to a disproportionate increase in rates.

The Committee was also concerned about in-year cuts to that grant, as occurred in June 2010. That cut impacted heavily on councils with lower wealth levels and presented significant budgeting issues for the councils affected, as their rates had already been struck and their income fixed for the rest of the year.

1.00 pm

The Committee accepted that although future cuts to council grants could not be ruled out, it was important that the Department could no longer make cuts to the grant within a budget year. Therefore, it recommended amending the Local Government Finance Bill to prevent that happening again. I am pleased to say that that amendment was supported by the Assembly and in-year cuts to the rates support grant will

no longer be allowed. On that basis, on behalf of the Environment Committee, I welcome these regulations and support the motion.

Mr Molloy: A LeasCheann Comhairle, go raibh maith agat. I, like the Chair, support the motion. We need to add a number of caveats on issues around the review. We are looking into creating new councils and structures that I hope will mean that new councils and rates will be in place in the near future. It is important that that review is built into the procedures, so that we have the opportunity to come back to this.

Another issue relates to councils knowing in advance what the rates support will be. Too many councils have been unable to get such advance information or have been given false information in the form of a figure that does not materialise. It is important that councils know what their rates support grant will be well in advance of setting their own rates. That should continue throughout the year, instead of, as the Chair said, cuts being announced in the middle of the year, after councils have set their rates.

There is also the issue of the collection of the rates. In my previous council, Dungannon, I found that its staff and officials ended up collecting the rates for Land and Property Services (LPS). So, it is important that LPS does its job and ensures that councils get the maximum rates that they are entitled to. We must have clear demarcation between what council officials and clerks have to do and what LPS does to try to get those rates in to ensure that councils receive the maximum amount available through rates and through the rates support grants from central government.

With those issues in mind, it is important that we set in place a new structure to support councils in doing their work. However, they need assurances that what they are guaranteed at the beginning of the year is maintained through the year and that there is support for, and not a decline in, their rates income.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue, particularly as it is one of only a few important matters to have come up since May. I digress for a second, but we need to keep in mind that rates are very important and, maybe like corporation tax, they are one of the tools in the system that we need to review at all times.

This statutory rule has been made under section 27 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which, as we all know, is a piece of legislation that relates to the provision of grants to district councils, as well as making wider provision for the financial affairs of district councils across Northern Ireland. Although, in theory, this statutory rule only replaces the resources element of the general grant currently paid to councils with the rates support grant, it is still important that it is afforded the relevant time and attention in the House through debate.

When the Local Government Finance Bill was passing through the Assembly at the start of this year, my party argued that the rates support grant element of it was vital for councils. That would be particularly the case for the less wealthy districts across the Province. The grant will play an important role in their financial health and allow them to provide the basic statutory services that all councils must deliver. The fact that the rates support grant will be paid only to councils with a wealth per head of population below the Northern Ireland average means that it has the potential to assist the Executive, through the auspices of local councils, to meet some of their responsibilities to deliver for severely disadvantaged communities. It is unfortunate that there is a widespread lack of equalisation in rates across the 26 councils. So, I welcome the fact that, through the grant, the Department is able to use government funds in order to provide some form of equality in the delivery of government services.

During the legislative stages earlier this year, I had significant concerns that the Department was seeking to increase its powers under the cover of the rates support grant. The fact that it was seeking the power to make in-year cuts to the rates support grant was, and seemed to be at the time, absolutely ludicrous. I, therefore, welcome the fact that the Minister said today that there will not be in-year cuts and that there will be streamlining. I also welcome the fact — I think that Mr Molloy said this — that councils would know the exact figures at the beginning of the year. All this had the potential to lead to chaos in council management, because schemes that might already have determined budgets were facing the risk of significant in-year cuts. So, I reaffirm that I am very grateful for what has been put in place.

I was glad that the Environment Committee was able to table an amendment to thwart the proposal and to see the amendment successfully

made, despite stiff opposition from the DUP and the then Minister. The debate showed that sometimes it really is better for Members of the House to stick to their beliefs and gut feelings rather than to blindly follow the opinions of officials in a ministry that they might have notional control of.

Given that the regulations are intended to come into operation next Tuesday, there is no time to waste. The Ulster Unionist Party is, therefore, pleased to offer its support for the affirmative resolution of the new statutory rule.

Mr Attwood: I thank all the Members who contributed. Mr Kinahan made a number of telling points in a discussion that might otherwise have been perceived as somewhat routine. He said that these matters need to be afforded relevant time and attention, be it in Committee, in the Department or, indeed, here on the Floor of the Assembly, not least because, as he and other Members indicated, the grant is a critical element in the expenditure of 19 of the 26 councils and reflects local circumstances, such as the deprivation therein and, on occasions, particularly in respect of rural councils, issues in sparsely populated areas.

The total amount of grant aid to be paid this year to those 19 councils is over £18 million on the resource element side alone. A little under £800,000 will go to Larne Borough Council, £1·3 million will go to Down District Council, £1·5 million will go to Armagh City and District Council, and £1·7 million will go to Strabane District Council. Various amounts in between will go to the other 10 or 11 councils. So, the rates support grant is a critical feature of council expenditure for the reasons outlined.

Given Mr Kinahan's observation on what might have been the case in the Department heretofore, I reassure him that I am not notionally in control of my Department. I think that the standard for every Minister is — I keep saying this — whether the Minister is in Government and whether the Minister is in power. Do Ministers know the difference? I will leave that question hanging in the air. You might imply that I have some views on all that.

I confirm what the Chair of the Committee said about the fact that the formula will remain the same. Although the terminology, architecture and process will be somewhat different, the formula will remain the same. It will be on that basis that grant aid will be paid. I again confirm that the amount paid in the course of the year will be guaranteed for that year. I hear the argument that creating certainty for councils going forward will be an important feature.

If I may move aside from that for a second, I think that, in light of the economic circumstances, there is a growing possibility of another emergency Budget from the London Government. In that context, there would be consequences for all devolved Administrations. The current general financial formula for the Budget and government could, therefore, be subject to further pressures. That should be a further imperative for us to stretch ourselves in determining how we manage our own money and in identifying new sources of money. That is still not being addressed with the necessary vigour.

I confirm to Mr Molloy that the grant will be protected this year. I take his point that certainty is needed at the beginning of every year so that councils know their position. In light of the late hour at which the Assembly passed the Budget in the current year — for reasons that will not detain us today — I hope that, in future years, regardless of who is Minister of the Environment, it will be very important to him or her to create certainty at the earliest opportunity to enable councils to make financial plans informed by however much the grant might be.

I think that Mr Molloy mentioned the need to ensure that any review of policy that is required as a consequence of RPA will be subject to rural proofing and equality screening, given that one criterion for grant aid is the sparsity of population. Clearly, that is a reference, inter alia, to the rural nature of our society. There are 26,000 farmers here, and, consequently, bungalows in many fields. That might not be the case in England — if Tom King is listening. In the context of the review of local government, there will, clearly, have to be a review of the formula to ensure that the model used is most consistent with the outcome of RPA.

I hear the point about whether councils will become the collection agency, rather than DFP. I will certainly raise that matter with my ministerial colleague Mr Wilson. It is not the intention to offload central government's responsibilities to local councils. If there were any indication that that was happening and that powers would end up being devolved, with new responsibilities and more besides through the back door, that would be further reason

why councils might be somewhat reticent in embracing governance functions in the context of RPA. I will raise the matter with my colleague Mr Wilson and pass on his reply, which, I am sure, will be reassuring to the Member.

I thank the Chairperson and other members of the Committee for their support for the motion. As Mr Kinahan indicated, in real time and in the real-life experience of people in the North, the decision being taken is significant, because it is a decision on the process and better management of how councils that represent areas of need can get more than £18 million. In that context, it is a good day's work.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the draft Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.*

Committee Business

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe: Assembly Nominee

Mr Deputy Speaker: It has been agreed that the motion will be treated as a business motion. There will, therefore, be no debate.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly appoints Mr Stewart Dickson as its nominee to the regional Chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. — [Ms J McCann.]*

1.15 pm

Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker: As with similar motions, this motion on Committee membership will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

> *That Mr Paul Frew replace Mr David McIlveen as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; and that Mr Adrian McQuillan replace Mr Paul Frew as a member of the Public Accounts Committee. — [Lord Morrow.]*

Private Members' Business

Forensic Science Services

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

Mr Craig: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes with concern the pressure and backlog in Forensic Science Northern Ireland; further notes the cuts to the Forensic Science Service on the UK mainland and the impact that this is having on Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Justice to provide the necessary resources to ensure that cases requiring forensics are processed efficiently.*

I will give a brief outline of the history of the motion. On 14 December 2010, the Home Office announced that it will close the Forensic Science Service (FSS) and wind it up by March 2012. The Forensic Science Service has been fully owned by government since December 2005, and it has analysed and interpreted crime scene evidence for the criminal justice system since 1999. The reason for its closure was that the government-owned company was operating at a loss of around £2 million a month. The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, James Brokenshire, told the House of Commons on 14 December 2010 that FSS continued to operate under uncompetitive terms and conditions, as well as expanding its workforce between 1999 and 2003 when funds were short. That was undertaken without bringing down the cost base towards a level where FSS would be able to compete with commercial rivals.

Over that time, we have seen the number of FSS rivals increase, and many have been established by former FSS members of staff. Those private firms have taken a market share from the former state-run monopoly.

To date, the survival of FSS has been dependent on government loans, which FSS has been unable to repay, resulting in a substantial loss to the public purse. The closure of FSS will ultimately place additional pressure on private sector companies to fill the void left.

Forensic science is used for the purpose of the law. It encompasses a range of disciplines, and although forensic science typically analyses DNA, hair fibres, footwear, firearms, drugs and human bodies, there are novel disciplines. It also does unique things, such as analysing hard drives for material evidence. When a crime or incident occurs, evidence is recovered from the crime scene, suspects, witnesses and victims. Some or all of the evidence may be submitted for forensic testing and analysis. It is a forensic scientist's job to test and interpret the results, prepare a witness statement and then pass it to the police, who decide what further action, if any, to take. If the case ends up in court, the statement can be used by the defence as well as by the prosecution.

The real difficulty with the House of Commons report into closing down the Forensic Science Service in England is that it accounts for almost 60% of all forensic work undertaken in the United Kingdom. That leaves a 40% market share for the private sector, and we may ask ourselves how that affects us in Northern Ireland. The answer is reasonably simple. Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) is unique to Northern Ireland. We have a service that performs all forensic duties for our police force. Unfortunately, no service can do 100% of the work, because there are peaks and troughs in the workload. All our excess work is subcontracted to the UK private sector so that it can keep the Northern Ireland workload level.

The decision taken by central government has caused a huge imbalance in how the private sector is working in the UK, and that is unfortunate for us. With many UK police forces scrambling to sign up private contractors to carry out forensic work for them, forensic services and the private sector are under huge pressure. A number of UK police forces are joining together in groups and signing up private contractors to do specific work for them, which excludes other police forces from also getting private work done by those same contractors.

What we are witnessing in the UK is the private sector's ability to deliver for the Police Service of Northern Ireland shrinking. That is a massive issue for the PSNI, because the workload is still there, but service delivery in the UK has

shrunk and continues to shrink. That has led to what has already been referred to in court many times, where some forensic evidence is taking seven to eight months to be delivered to the courts. That is having an adverse impact on the operation of our criminal justice system. That is regrettable, because the Assembly has been criticised many times about the whole criminal justice system. It has been said that cases are taking too long and that the system is inefficient and not delivering justice in a reasonable time. In this case, however, something that central government in Westminster has done has had an adverse effect on service delivery here. Therefore, I appeal to the Minister to look into the situation to see whether there is any other means by which the Assembly can help out with the delivery of forensic services in Northern Ireland. Would that mean expanding our existing government-based system to cater for the imbalance that has been created in the entire UK? As I said, many people are complaining. In fact, the judiciary is complaining about the amount of time being taken to deliver forensic services in Northern Ireland.

Our Government cannot sit back and be inactive. We need to look at the situation and react urgently to it. The factors that led to that situation may be well outside our control, but the situation did happen and is happening. Unfortunately, the situation is not getting better for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. However, thankfully, our Police Service is not in the rest of the United Kingdom, because police services there are in an even worse situation.

I ask the Minister to look at how forensic services in Northern Ireland are delivered and at whether there is any way that the capacity of those services can be increased, even in the short term, while the private sector in the British Isles adjusts to 60% of the market share to fund the forensic services sector being withdrawn.

Mr McDevitt: I beg to move the following amendment: At end insert

> *"; and further calls on the Minister to explore the possible development of an all-island framework for forensic science, to ensure that all resources are used to the maximum benefit of the victims of crime and the criminal justice systems both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland."*

We are bringing the amendment to the motion tabled in the names of Mr Craig and others names to reflect, first, a reality that has existed for a couple of years and that, as far as I can see, was first noted by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in its report of March 2010, when it commended the collaboration between Forensic Science Northern Ireland and its counterpart in the South. The report went on to commend FSNI, too, for its work in assisting forensic science practitioners across the world but noted that workplace pressures on the service are such that the day-to-day provision of forensic science in Northern Ireland is nearly all-consuming.

Mr Craig has well outlined the challenges facing the service here and in Great Britain. Indeed, across the water, a much bigger and exceptionally controversial debate is going on about the future provision of forensic science services to the police services and criminal justice agencies in England and Wales. However, we have the opportunity here to defend what we have, make it considerably better and take full advantage of the economies of scale and the sharing and pooling of expertise on this island to ensure that our criminal justice system in Northern Ireland and, indeed, the criminal justice systems across these islands have a world-class forensic science service at their disposition.

We believe that our amendment does just that. It adds to the motion and does not try to undermine or take away from it. It provides a proper context within which a future development of forensic science should take place. Indeed, when the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee conducted its inquiry into Forensic Science Northern Ireland, it noted:

> *"FSNI provides, impartially and to standards of scientific rigour uninfluenced by any consideration of the success or otherwise of any prosecution, the evidence which might establish a suspect's innocence or guilt. Public trust in its fairness and impartiality can only be maintained by its remaining separate from the other justice agencies while working with them in the interests of justice."*

I sense from Mr Craig's comments, and I hope that I will hear from other colleagues in the House, a strong determination across all our Benches to continue to have an impartial and independent forensic science service. The question then is not about whether we have such a service but about how that service can be made to work best for the interests of all our people.

It was welcome to note the statement by the Minister of Justice, who is with us this afternoon,

and Minister Shatter, the Minister for Justice in the Republic of Ireland on 8 June 2011. It followed a joint meeting between the two Ministers at which they signed a memorandum of understanding to support co-operation between the forensic science agencies on the island of Ireland.

I note our own Minister's words on that day:

> *"This memorandum ensures that the forensic science laboratories in both jurisdictions can rely on each other's facilities in the event of sudden loss or damage to either laboratory and further strengthens the working relationships that are already in place between the two services."*

It is also encouraging to note that, in the 'North/South Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters: Work Programme 2011-2012' — we sure are good at writing up the titles of work programmes in the House — objective 2 is:

> *"To explore further opportunities for cooperation in the area of forensic science between Northern Ireland and Ireland particularly in light of the proposed closure of the Forensic Science Service (England) and the resultant impact."*

1.30 pm

In their forward work programme, the two Ministers have given themselves a target of April 2012 to bring forward the framework for co-operation. I appeal to the Minister for that timetable to be accelerated, not because of any particular political interest, but because it is very much in the selfish interests of the forensic science service here in Northern Ireland to have a clear line of sight on its future relationship with other resources on this island and elsewhere, so that it can maximise and best plan its service delivery for us at a regional level.

That service delivery has, of course, been dogged with delays and some problems. They were most obviously noted in the Criminal Justice Inspection report on Forensic Science Northern Ireland in July 2009. Of course, that report predated the devolution of justice powers to the House and so made a series of recommendations to the then Northern Ireland Office. It was somewhat depressing at the time to note that 22 of the 35 recommendations made some years earlier remained outstanding. That highlights a point that Mr Craig articulated very well, which is that the problems in forensic science here have been building up for some time and that we are dealing with considerable legacy issues as well as the need now to confront the prospect of radical change in Great Britain.

It is also worth noting, in defence and support of the amendment that we tabled, that recommendation 2 of Criminal Justice Inspection's July 2009 report reads:

> *"FSNI should seek to develop, in conjunction with other laboratories (e.g. Republic of Ireland and Scotland) a plan to facilitate increased collaboration including the exchange of staff on secondment".*

It might be helpful if the Minister, in his response to the debate, could outline what progress he is aware of specifically on the point of increased co-operation, exchange of staff and secondments. It is long past the time when we should be talking about opportunities to maximise the services across our regions. It is long beyond the time when we should be identifying obvious areas for co-operation. We are apparently moving at the pace of a slow snail in translating those opportunities into reality. It is for that reason that we tabled the amendment, and I call on colleagues on all sides of the House to support the amendment and the motion.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the amendment. A proper functioning forensic science service is essential in any criminal justice system. It builds community confidence, speeds up the process of justice and is an important part of the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences.

In England and Wales, as the Member opposite has already outlined, there is an ongoing process of winding down the FSS because it was in a dire financial position and could not compete with other providers. In the North of Ireland, FSNI has been criticised on a number of occasions by the Criminal Justice Inspection on several management issues and its strategic vision. It found that the agency faced critical challenges that raised concerns about its continued viability. The delivery of forensic sciences in the North of Ireland is basically a monopoly, with the PSNI as FSNI's biggest customer. The fact that the agency is based in a PSNI-owned building questions its independence.

It is difficult for any forensic science agency to survive in such a small area. FSNI already works closely with its counterpart in Dublin on

crime issues that affect the island of Ireland. The criminal justice system on the island of Ireland would be enhanced by further integration and the use of existing resources, skills and innovation. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr B McCrea: At least we are getting through the speeches rightly. It has been a while since I have heard Mr McDevitt, who has now left me, not take his full 10 minutes.

Mr Givan: You put it right.

Mr B McCrea: Yes. Perhaps I can take a few of the extra minutes left over.

The public's impression of what forensic sciences can do comes from the TV. People think that it is all quick and easy and that a few test tubes will tell who did it. I know that the Chairperson of the Justice Committee will smile with me when I say that it shocked me to discover that, when we were planning to visit the forensic science laboratory, we all had to give DNA samples so that we could be eliminated from inquiries, from what I could see. That made some of us think about whether we ought to go. Nevertheless, that shows the sensitivity of the results.

In fact, the biggest problem for forensics is that it has become exceedingly expensive to deal with any meaningful results. A number of things came back. Mr Craig mentioned the crisis that faces us because of the changes. I agree with him that it will take many years for the private sector to pick up the slack. There is an issue, and it is right and timely that he should bring it to our attention.

My information about the problems facing forensic sciences comes from two particularly high-profile incidents, the first of which is the Omagh bombing. The investigation of that incident relied heavily on forensics. I shall not go into the details of the case, but it was amazing how modest the samples were and how important it was to ensure that there was no cross-contamination along with the amount of work and effort that it took to ensure that that did not happen. Even then, there were difficulties.

When I looked at the costs that were associated with the investigation of the murder of the two soldiers at Massereene barracks, I discovered that the police were making applications for additional financial resources because that investigation, on its own, would have taken up almost 80% of the PSNI budget for that year if it had not received additional support. A lot of the services that were used had to be provided from different areas of the British Isles. It was right and proper that that was done, but people should be aware of it. It came to my attention recently that two people were required to travel for three days to deliver one set of samples to a laboratory in England. The cost of that must have been significant. There is an issue here about how we ensure that the very real benefits of forensic science are gained at an appropriate cost. In that regard, the Minister will want to look at forensic science as part of the overall investigation into the criminal justice system.

The amendment seems rather spurious. I do not mean to cause huge offence, but it smacks of something that is designed to give someone an extra five minutes in which to talk. We already have a memorandum of understanding, and we work these things on a cross-border and, equally, an all-Ireland basis. The proposer of the amendment said that it added to the original motion. I do not think that it does, so I am somewhat reluctant to support it.

In the final analysis —

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

Mr B McCrea: The original motion is absolutely fine, and we are happy to support it. However, we need to hear more from the SDLP as to why we should support the amendment.

Mr Lunn: I welcome the motion as an opportunity for the Minister to clarify the situation and address the obvious concerns of Members and the general public. The delays in the work of Forensic Science Northern Ireland are a matter of concern. The report of the prisons review team that was published today highlights the impact that those delays can have on the Prison Service, how they impact on victims, witnesses and defendants and how they affect wider public confidence in the justice system, as well as the cost to the public purse.

I know from the Minister's response to the report earlier today and other statements that he has made that tackling those delays is high on his agenda. I look forward to hearing from him further about that in the course of this afternoon's debate. I would like him to put the issue in context as to what the actual backlog is in respect of the service-level agreement

between the PSNI and FSNI. I heard recently that up to about 4,000 exhibits were collected for just one investigation into a bomb blast. Such figures perhaps help us to understand the extent of the problem.

As the amendment suggests, the provision of forensic science services is not simply a local matter any more. I am aware of very good co-operation, which other Members have mentioned, between our Minister and his fellow Ministers in Dublin and Edinburgh. There are clear benefits to service provision from the high level of co-operation that they pursue. Ministers should give proper consideration to not only the immediate and short-term needs of their jurisdiction but the long-term benefits to their own and neighbouring jurisdictions of a partnership approach. It is unfortunate, therefore, that ministerial counterparts in London appear to have taken an entirely unilateral approach to the provision of services. The Westminster Government have declared that there will be no continuing state interest in a forensic provider by March 2012. I imagine that the interest to which they refer is financial. I wonder whether they are taking a sufficient interest in the operational impact of that decision.

In the short term, I am aware that concerns have been expressed in England and Wales about the capacity of the private sector to cope with the level of demand that is currently being met by the Forensic Science Service there. If it does not have the capacity to deal with its workload, there will certainly not be any offers of help to deal with the additional work that we or our colleagues in Scotland may need to outsource. It is kind of ironic that, when members of our judiciary are calling for the pressures on our service to be addressed by sharing work with the service in England, the Government there are reducing the capacity of that system to take on additional work.

Another concern is a longer-term one. It is in everyone's interests that forensic service providers continue to invest in research and development. Our criminal justice systems need to keep up to speed with if not lead on the development of new and improved techniques. Is that likely to be the case across the water if there is an entirely privatised service? I would have thought that their interest in research and development would certainly be limited. I have heard some talk about universities perhaps becoming involved and the Government funding research and development in a different way, but that does not look too good.

1.45 pm

Our Minister's commitment to the provision and development of forensic services here is clear from the budget decisions that he has made already, including the £12 million of capital investment in the current budgetary period. The motion calls for the necessary resources to be provided, and I will listen to what the Minister has to say about that.

The amendment calls for an all-Ireland framework to ensure that resources are used for maximum benefit. It is hard to disagree with such a call, depending on what is meant by "framework". As I have made clear today and when talking about other services, effective North/South partnerships are critical, but we should not limit ourselves to those. Where appropriate, partnerships should also be explored and developed on an east-west basis — Scotland is east of here — with neighbouring jurisdictions.

I await the Minister's response on the amendment. It may be that he feels that the amendment does not go far enough to reflect even the current arrangements. Mr McDevitt asked for clarification —

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

Mr Lunn: Other Members have referred to the co-operation that already has been signed up to with the Republic, and there are the beginnings of a tripartite arrangement between Scotland, the Republic and Northern Ireland. We support the motion and the amendment.

Mr D McIlveen: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue. For two simple reasons, we do not support the amendment. First, as Mr McCrea mentioned, there is already a memorandum of understanding. Secondly, it is very insular to look at the issue of forensics, security and policing in one jurisdiction. It is well known now that, in security and policing —

Mr McDevitt: The Member says that it would be insular to look at the issue in one jurisdiction. The point of the amendment is to look at it not in one jurisdiction but, in fact, in two jurisdictions. Surely the amendment addresses the very point that he has raised. It is not an insular amendment but an expansive one.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention. I think that he knows exactly what I meant by that statement. There is already a memorandum of understanding for security and policing, and there are already relationships throughout Europe and the world through Interpol and so on. I understand why the Member has tabled the amendment, but looking at the issue from a North/South perspective is insular, and it is difficult for us to support that.

That said, the move by the Government to push forensics into a competitive market could be deemed to be negligent and perhaps even dangerous. It is not too big a leap to presume that allowing non-accredited labs from the private sector and the police, rather than an independent, government-funded organisation, to have a key role in forensic delivery is verging on the unjust. For unfortunate reasons, forensics in Northern Ireland have been propelled into the limelight. They have been world-leading and have a list of accreditations to back that up. Our forensic scientists need to continue to get the support that they deserve, because they provide a world-class service.

I recognise that there are budgetary constraints, and there are issues in Forensic Science Northern Ireland that need to be addressed. For example, it takes, on average, three years to recruit a toxicologist to the organisation. Surely that needs to be addressed. There is also a backlog in the work of FSNI, which, previously, would have been absorbed partly by the forensic services in Great Britain. Given that cuts are to be made on the mainland that will have a knock-on effect here, the pressures are a double whammy to Northern Ireland, and we have to take that on board. FSNI has been in its temporary accommodation for 17 years. If that is anyone's definition of temporary, let me say that mine is very different.

We have to raise our concerns about the move, and I put three direct questions to you, Minister, because there are real dangers for Northern Ireland if we do not try to address the balance in some way. First, by flooding the market with private forensic providers, we risk establishing the principle that whoever provides the cheapest service wins the right to deal with incredibly sensitive and important materials. I have no problem with a competitive market; it is fine in almost any other walk of life. However, I do not believe that we want that for our justice system. That is not the right way forward. Is the Minister opposed to any privatisation of forensic services in Northern Ireland? Secondly, I believe that the PSNI undertakes some forensic services in-house. However, that practice was criticised in the recent Criminal Justice Inspection report, and a lack of resources for the FSNI risks placing additional pressure on the PSNI to undertake more work on that basis, which, in turn, risks putting the police on the wrong side of Criminal Justice Inspection. Thirdly, an influx of private competitors, coupled with a diverse budgetary environment, increases the pressure on the Department of Justice to opt for cheaper means of forensic science investigation. Are the Government committed to ensuring that cost is not a factor in the administration of justice in Northern Ireland?

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, support the motion and amendment. Most Members said that there was a clear need for an impartial, independent forensic science service in any criminal justice system. We should be looking at that and at which system would be the best.

My colleague Mr Lynch referred to the legacy issues with Forensic Science NI. The Criminal Justice Inspection report looked at the time taken to recruit staff, the security clearance process required, the lack of flexibility in moving staff from one place to another and the expertise needed. There was also criticism of the time that it takes to get the results of tests on illegal substances. Such issues show that we can make the forensic science service better.

I turn now to the amendment. It came as no surprise to hear what the Members on the Benches opposite said about the all-island, joined-up view of any Department here. As I have said on the Floor previously, they should not be afraid or concerned about having an all-island approach to any Ministry or Department. We see the duplication of services in education, health and in the Department of Justice, so no one should be afraid of such an approach. The sharing of resources and expertise right across the island will bring us a better forensic science service. It is important that we open our minds to that and stop feeling threatened.

Mr Craig: Does the Member accept that, even at present, there is a memorandum of

understanding between and joint working on forensic services by the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland? My difficulty with the motion is that it is restrictive in some senses. There should be an all-islands approach to forensics. We cannot leave out Scotland, Wales or, for that matter, England, with which, I believe, links might already exist.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his intervention. Yes, there is a memorandum of understanding, and he is right about collaborative thinking with Scotland or wherever, but we have to remember that we live on a small island. When you live on an island, it is sometimes much better to look closer to home than to look elsewhere. That said, I do not think that the amendment disagrees with the motion. It just looks at an all-island approach.

We have access to justice, which is important. Whether forensic science is working for the prosecution or for the defence, it is quickening up the justice system. It is a better system, and it means that people who are on trial spend less time on remand. It also means that victims of crime have less time to wait. Sometimes that wait can be worse for the victim, particularly in certain crimes. An independent forensic science service should be the best that we can make it, and I think that the amendment enhances the motion.

Mr Hussey: Anyone who knows anything about a modern-day police service will understand that many crimes are solved only because of the forensic evidence that the perpetrators leave behind. We have a come a long way since the days of fingerprint evidence, and we now have resources that can pinpoint an individual almost to his or her front door. As an elected Assembly, we know that anyone who is the victim of a crime wants the person responsible to be put behind bars, and we also know that those who are prepared to carry out actions such as the unwarranted attack on the elderly lady in Newry at the weekend will do all in their power to escape and avoid being brought to justice.

Forensic Science Northern Ireland is an agency of the Department of Justice that employs around 220 staff, and its responsibilities include the provision of scientific advice and support to enhance the delivery of justice. It plays an essential role in ensuring that serious crimes are cleared up as quickly and efficiently as possible. Forensic science also plays a key role in providing evidence throughout criminal proceedings. Clearly, there is a direct link with the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, with 90% of the work of the agency being directly linked to police investigations. The work that it deals with covers all aspects of crime in Northern Ireland, including violent crime, offences against the person and drugs-related crime. The threat that still exists from dissident republicans should not be underestimated, and the expertise that is being established by Forensic Science Northern Ireland is essential in bringing those terrorists to justice.

Two separate databases exist in Northern Ireland for the storage of DNA and fingerprints. The database maintained by the PSNI contains details of up to 240,000 people, and Forensic Science Northern Ireland maintains a separate database from suspects, crime scenes and victims. The database currently holds around 91,000 subject profiles and around 18,000 crime scene profiles. DNA obtained by the police in Northern Ireland is also stored on the UK's national DNA database in Birmingham.

There is undoubtedly pressure on Forensic Science Northern Ireland, and, under the Department of Justice efficiency plans, it is the only agency that is not expected to make any efficiency savings until 2014-15. Even in that year, the efficiency savings are only £0·1 million. That clearly illustrates how far its budget is stretched. The backlog that is mentioned in the motion is also an issue. Forensic Science Northern Ireland has a backlog reduction strategy and targets in place to attempt to deal with that.

There is evidence in the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee report from February 2010 on Forensic Science Northern Ireland, and the important issues highlighted include the unsuitable staff recruitment process, which has already been mentioned on several occasions; inadequate and unsuitable premises — "temporary" means 17 years; the lack of knowledge in the judiciary of what forensic science can and cannot do; and separation from other criminal justice agencies to ensure impartiality and public trust.

The motion is somewhat misleading because of the fact that the Forensic Science Service in Great Britain is being wound down and will cease to operate by March 2012. Given that the

Forensic Science Service is making operating losses of some £2 million a month, it is obviously unsustainable in its current form. It is envisaged that the UK forensic science industry will operate as a genuine market with private sector companies competing to provide services at the lowest cost. Therefore, the situation is not as basic as noting the cuts in the UK mainland as most suggest.

We agree that the Justice Minister should provide the necessary resources to ensure that cases requiring forensics are processed efficiently.

I believe that we can support the motion while clarifying that what is happening on the mainland is not simply cuts but, in effect, a process of privatisation of forensic services. Throwing money at the forensic service will not solve all its problems, as shown by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's report. Again, I refer back to the recruitment processes.

2.00 pm

Several Members have commented on the memorandum of understanding, which is to support co-operation between the forensic science agencies on the island of Ireland. It was signed by our Justice Minister, David Ford, and Alan Shatter. The SDLP amendment could, therefore, be opposed. Cross-border crime is a real issue that must be tackled in partnership with the Republic of Ireland, and, therefore, this memorandum of understanding is welcome and a good example of cross-border partnership in a matter of mutual interest. The North/South co-operation on criminal justice matters work programme 2011-12 —

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

Mr Hussey: It seems that the SDLP tries to amend everything to include an all-Ireland approach. We are happy to accept the motion as proposed.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue of forensic science resourcing. From the contributions being made today, it is clearly a matter of significant importance to the criminal justice system in general. I hope that today's debate can go some way to providing a degree of assurance, both to this Assembly and to the broader public, who rightly want to know that they have a forensic science service that is providing a top quality service to the justice system in general.

However, we should not underestimate the problems that exist, the challenges that face FSNI and, indeed, the challenges facing other forensic science services in the UK and elsewhere. The forensic science agency achieves a huge amount each year. It stores and tracks 100,000 new items annually, derived from 6,000 cases. Its main customer, as Members have said, is the PSNI, which provides 93% of exhibits submitted, and 80% of that caseload comes from violent and serious offences. These serious cases, including those related to dissident terrorism, are dealt with as a priority. Although I accept that improvements can and should be made, I am reassured by the fact that the PPS has identified only two cases that are overdue for court hearings. I will return to that issue.

We have recently seen significant growth in demand for forensic services. The unwelcome emergence of dissident terrorist activity, current high levels of serious crime and a substantial increase in the seizure of drugs have combined to place FSNI's services under strain. As you would expect, the prioritisation of work on explosives, firearms and cases involving serious and violent crime sometimes means that other cases experience some delay. For example, the investigation into the brutal murder of Constable Ronan Kerr, as has been mentioned, generated around 4,000 forensic exhibits.

The increased workload being experienced by FSNI, coupled with the absolute requirement that the standards of investigation and analyses be maintained at the highest levels, means that work has not progressed as quickly as any of us would like on some occasions.

In response to these new demands and in order to help to clear some of the backlog in forensic science, particularly in relation to priority cases, I will make some additional resources available to the Police Service for forensic services within this financial year. This will be a one-off exercise designed to clear the backlog associated with drugs cases. However, I have to point out that the rigorous accreditation and training requirements for forensic services mean that capacity issues cannot be resolved overnight. We must accept that there is a necessary lead-in time.

There has been a very high workload in recent years. There was a surge in demand at the turn of the financial year, which has exacerbated the current backlog. The forensic science lab is feeling the keenest pressure in work on drugs

cases as a result of a high level of submissions. In response to that, FSNI instigated a strategic improvement programme some months ago to increase resources in drugs and toxicology, and to review all its processes and products as well as customer needs.

More generally, the Department recognised the need to support FSNI to help it to meet the demands of a modern and challenging justice system. We are working closely with FSNI, the PSNI and the PPS to address these crucial issues and to deliver improvements.

A number of lines are being followed, and they include the recruitment of additional expert scientists, particularly in the field of toxicology, some re-engineering of services and the potential for the use of video links. I am keen that we explore all avenues to improve forensic performance. That includes the use of presumptive testing for drugs, which has been proven to work in other jurisdictions. Therefore, I am keen for any exploration that has the potential for application in Northern Ireland to be taken forward quickly. Much of the work will be linked to the multi-agency programme that I am overseeing on speeding up the criminal justice system and about which I have provided regular progress reports to the Justice Committee.

As I hope Members on all sides can see, we are taking clear action to address the challenges facing forensic services in Northern Ireland. That action includes not only making additional resources available, but looking at ways to deliver services faster and more efficiently in the longer term.

I now turn to issues regarding the Forensic Science Service in England and Wales. As it has been a little unclear, I should point out that when we talk about FSS, we are taking specifically about England and Wales. Several Members, including the proposer, referred to the UK national Government. The reality is that, in this context, we are talking about the Government for England and Wales. The position in Scotland is extremely different.

Last year's announcement by the Home Office that the Forensic Science Service is to be wound down may have some bearing on Northern Ireland due to possible reductions in capacity for the brokering of services across the market, both in the public and private sectors. However, despite that change in England and Wales, forensic provision in Northern Ireland, in common with Scotland and the Republic and, indeed, as far as I know, the rest of Europe, is delivered by a specialist public sector organisation. Although I am committed to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of forensic science provision following an in-depth review by my Department of the option for such provision here, I am convinced that subjecting forensic science to market forces is not the best way to provide the service that we need in Northern Ireland.

FSNI's status as an accountable government agency, operationally independent from the police, is also an important element in ensuring scientific objectivity and supporting public confidence in policing and justice. Having mentioned Scotland, I should make it clear that there have been some cutbacks in the public service provided in Scotland, which, I understand, has included some loss of staff. However, the Scottish service remains within the public sector. In that context, as Members have highlighted, on 8 June 2011, I signed a memorandum of understanding with Alan Shatter, the Republic's Minister for Justice and Equality, to support co-operation between forensic science agencies on the island of Ireland.

FSNI has also recently signed a memorandum of understanding with its counterpart organisation in Scotland to develop strategic partnerships for mutual co-operation. I am due to discuss the issue further when I meet the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, in November. It is also a standing agenda item in intergovernmental meetings with our colleagues in Dublin. In addition, the heads of the forensic science services in Northern Ireland, the Republic and Scotland have agreed a tripartite memorandum of understanding to collaborate on a range of issues, including research and procurement. Those are examples of the excellent co-operation at operational level between criminal justice organisations on both sides of the border and across the North Channel. Those memoranda ensure that the forensic science laboratories in each jurisdiction can rely on one another's facilities in the event of sudden loss or damage and further strengthens the working relationships already in place between those services.

I am committed to working closely with my Irish counterpart on areas of mutual interest to help to build safer communities across Ireland. Operationally, criminal justice agencies on both

sides of the border are working closely, and I want to continue to maximise that co-operation. I hope that that answers the points that were made by Mr McDevitt when he proposed the amendment.

My fellow Justice Ministers in Scotland and Ireland and I have recognised the importance of our forensic science providers working together to ensure effectiveness and value for money. I hope that Members will welcome that important development. Indeed, it was highlighted by my colleague Trevor Lunn. In future, such collaboration will include the benchmarking of costs, mutual support with the possible sharing of expertise, and joint contingency planning.

Members will be aware of the concerns expressed recently by some members of the judiciary about the delivery of forensic services. Indeed, some Members have highlighted those concerns. Therefore, I will say a few words about that. I understand those concerns, and I agree that we need to work together across the justice system to tackle delay and to speed up justice. I recently discussed that in some detail with the Lord Chief Justice, and I was able to get a better understanding of the judiciary's position on that crucial issue. I was also able to give him some assurance as to the actions that we were taking within DOJ.

In truth, the judiciary's position is similar to mine. We all acknowledge that FSNI delivers quality work under challenging conditions, but, equally, we recognise that improvements can and should be made. I want to put the scale of delay in perspective. As I said earlier, there are only two cases being dealt with by FSNI that the PPS has identified as being behind schedule in court hearings. However, with regard to the wider figures, and in response to the point made by Trevor Lunn in particular, there is a backlog of 11·9% of cases, including over 32% of drugs cases, due to the upsurge in demand in recent months.

As I said earlier, my officials are working closely with the forensic science agency and the police to address the situation. Allied to that, FSNI's strategic improvement programme would drive performance improvements in a number of key areas. Indeed, some of those improvements are under way. They include the removal of three cross-skilled staff members from other areas and into alcohol, drugs and toxicology work. Furthermore, a recruitment exercise is under way for two new toxicology reporting officers, and FSNI has approached the Scottish laboratory for secondees and transferees. FSNI will carry out a best practice benchmark review of its key processes against the Scottish labs.

More generally, speeding up justice, as I have said frequently in the Chamber, is one of my key priorities. As the Youth Justice Review team has pointed out, it is one of the most significant challenges facing the justice system. Although I am pleased that we are making some progress in that area, I am disappointed that we have not yet made the step change that we all agree is needed. Ultimately, I am clear that fundamental reform is required to deliver the necessary improvements.

This is a complex issue, and there is no single cause of delay. Although addressing the issues within forensic science is part of the solution, we should be under no illusion that that will solve the problem overall. A comprehensive and coherent package of reforms is required, and, as I said, I am directly overseeing a multi-agency programme to achieve that. A number of measures are under consideration. A particular focus at the moment is a public consultation on measures to encourage earlier guilty pleas, which I hope to publish shortly. In addition, we are reviewing how cases are initiated, developing a consultation on the reform of committal proceedings and examining the increasing use of video links. Further proposals will come forward as the programme develops. As part of that, we will also be taking full account of the recommendations of the Youth Justice Review team, the Access to Justice Review and the forthcoming CJINI review of services for victims and witnesses. Therefore, the work to address the issues with FSNI should be seen in the context of an ambitious multi-agency programme of work to speed up justice more generally.

I have allocated over £2·1 million to FSNI for the current financial year, and that includes £300,000 to fund pressures in relation to explosives capabilities. I have committed to providing a further £1 million across the remainder of the Budget 2010 period for that purpose. I am also making a significant investment of £12 million in the development of new laboratory facilities to house DNA and evidence-recovery functions.

When dealing with a complex, technical and highly specialised field such as forensic science,

money is not the only resource. We need to build capacity in our equipment and skills, and, with the best will in the world, that takes significant time. That is why we are making best use of the specialist scientific staff available through cross-skilling, seeking to second from other laboratories and direct recruitment. That will allow FSNI to build its capacity to continue to meet the complex needs of the justice system.

As Members will be acutely aware, these are very difficult economic times, but forensic science is a priority service, and I am committed to ensuring that the service is resourced sufficiently to continue to deliver an effective service.

I appreciate the contributions to the debate from all sides of the House. I express my appreciation to those who introduced the debate, those who proposed the amendment and those who contributed. If we look at practice in England and Wales and recognise the problems that are being experienced there, which are alluded to in the motion by the reference to the UK mainland, and recognise the ongoing co-operation in Scotland and with Ireland, it is entirely appropriate that the motion and the amendment should be agreed in recognition of work that is ongoing and that the Department will seek to expedite. As the House will appreciate, decisions on precise practices and resourcing have to be based on an assessment of what is appropriate, proportionate and effective to support the cohesive working we need across the justice system.

2.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Members who have contributed to the debate thus far. In particular, I thank the Minister of Justice who has brought balance to the debate by discussing how the needs of forensic science in Northern Ireland meet the needs of the justice system. His contribution was important in dealing with the issue of forensic science on this island and co-operation elsewhere.

One important point is that what the Westminster Government are doing is dangerous. The privatisation of forensic science could mean — I am not saying this with certainty — a deterioration in standards, and, as Mr Craig said, an emphasis being placed on cost rather than quality. That is a danger and must be recognised by all. Forensic science is a public service and it should remain within the public service; it is not something that should be privatised. My own view is that there are certain things that can be privatised, but forensic science is one of those things that should be protected. It is a vital public service in the administration of justice.

Our forensic science laboratory does a good job and it has continued to do so in difficult circumstances, particularly given the condition of its current premises. That issue must ultimately be addressed; I know that there are plans to do so and those should be expedited. With an increasing emphasis on DNA and DNA-related methodologies, there is a need for premises to be clean and for the risk of contamination to be severely restricted.

I thank those who contributed to the debate, including my colleague Mr McDevitt, Mr Lynch, Mr Lunn and Ms Jennifer McCann, who all agreed with the amendment that we tabled. We tabled the amendment in good faith. Given the pressures that forensic science will come under as a result of its privatisation in England and Wales, we believe that there will be a greater need for additional capacity, and that could be provided for south of the border. Therefore, the memorandum of understanding, which is important and which is recognised by the SDLP, is an important step in that direction. There could, though, be a wider development that would be advantageous to both sides of the border, and in particular to Northern Ireland, given the circumstances that are imposed on us by the Westminster Government. That makes good sense in dealing with the additional pressures that we will face in Northern Ireland.

I pay tribute to Mr Craig and his colleagues for tabling the motion. The motion is important, and it highlights the vital service that the forensic science laboratory in Northern Ireland provides to us and to the justice system. I thank Mr McCrea for his interesting contribution, and I regret that he cannot support the amendment. I also thank Mr Ross Hussey.

I must emphasise that the development of services on an all-island basis makes sense. The tripartite co-operation and memorandum of understanding that were referred to by the Minister are also important, and they will be helpful in the administration of forensic science in Northern Ireland. I hope that Members will see fit to unanimously support the amendment.

Mr Givan: I support the motion and oppose the amendment. However, there is little that I can disagree with in what has been said across

the Chamber on the work that FSNI does. It is important to put on record that we value that work and, as the professionals have highlighted, to recognise that FSNI is a centre that provides excellence in the work that it delivers and that it is held up by others as an exemplar.

However, given the explanation that the Justice Minister and other contributors outlined, this is an issue that, across the islands, has to be addressed on a collaborative basis. In our view, the amendment restricts that potential, albeit that the Justice Minister tried to provide some spin that it is in the overall spirit of what is proposed for all the islands. If you look specifically at the amendment, you will see that it does not properly recognise all the work that is done across the different jurisdictions that make up the United Kingdom or that which is done by our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland. That is why we oppose the amendment tabled by some of the Members on the opposite Benches. *[Interruption.]*

I hear Members shout "Predictable". I did not want to politicise this discussion. However, it is predictable that, at every possible opportunity, some Members on the opposite Benches want to all-Ireland these motions when it is completely unnecessary to do so. They did not need to do so, and they could have made their points about collaboration without tabling an amendment that has more to do with the leadership bid of the Member who is gesturing now. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should make all their remarks through the Chair.

Mr Givan: It has more to do with that Member's leadership bid than with the serious issue that is addressed in the motion. I will give way.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Givan for giving way. I take his point. However, the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee produced a report that said that we should develop this work on an all-island basis, the Criminal Justice Inspection produced a report saying that we should do it on an all-island basis, and this House has endorsed an all-island approach through the framework agreement that the Minister signed on its behalf. Where is the politicisation in acknowledging what we are already doing?

Mr Givan: The Member knows full well that the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee did a piece of work that recognised the collaboration that was taking place across the United Kingdom and with the Republic of Ireland. His party's amendment narrows that and makes it solely to do with the Republic of Ireland. I am not saying that we should not have collaboration; quite the opposite. If it catches criminals and prevents or detects crime, the more collaboration that takes place, the better. If that includes the Republic of Ireland, I am happy for such collaboration to happen. However, the amendment does not recognise that collaboration is also on a UK-wide basis. That is why my party opposes the amendment.

I want to move on to some of the other comments. The Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee looked at this issue and made recommendations. It has been pointed out that some members of the judiciary have been critical of the pace at which Forensic Science Northern Ireland has taken forward some of its work. The report made recommendations as to how the judiciary and FSNI could work together to get a better understanding of how things operate. I think that those should be taken forward. Like the Minister, I met the Lord Chief Justice and had discussions with him about FSNI. I, too, share his frustration that, on less serious crimes, there are protracted delays in getting evidence brought before the courts. Obviously, victims and the individuals who committed crimes have an interest in dealing with that as quickly as possible.

I hope that the investment that will be made in FSNI will help to deal with that. Given those criticisms, the Justice Committee felt that it would be worthwhile going to look at the operation to get a better understanding of how things work. My colleague from Lagan Valley highlighted that we will be required to give a DNA sample. However, to alleviate concerns — I know that some members are exercised by how long that sample will be retained — we have been assured that it will be disposed of immediately and that it will not be kept even for a five-year period. I hope that that alleviates other Members' concerns. It will be interesting to see which Members go along on that visit, even with that assurance that the DNA sample will be destroyed.

Members also highlighted that FSNI's priority cases have to be those that relate to serious crime. The Minister highlighted that the death of Constable Kerr has generated more than 4,000 exhibits, and it is right that that case is prioritised by FSNI. However, the obvious

consequence is that cases not deemed to be in the priority category are not heard as quickly as possible, as we would all like. Hopefully, work is being taken forward to deal with that.

I thank everyone who took part in the debate and those Members who tabled the amendment, but we will oppose it in a Division of the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question Time is due to commence at 2.30 pm, and a number of Members have indicated that they will oppose the amendment. That process will require some time, so I propose to put the Question on the amendment after Question Time. I ask Members to take their ease for a few minutes until 2.30 pm, when Question Time will commence.

The debate stood suspended.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Dealing with the Past

1. **Mr A Maginness** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action they intend to take, in co-operation with the Secretary of State and the Irish Government, following the recent passing of an Assembly motion calling for all-party talks on dealing with the past. (AQO 604/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Acting deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As the Member will know, the Department has responsibility for victims and survivors and, on that basis, published a strategy for victims and survivors in November 2009. In that strategy, we outlined our commitment to taking forward a range of victims and survivors issues. We identified what action was required in the following three key areas: a comprehensive assessment of the needs of victims and survivors to inform the development of the new service; dealing with the past; and building for the future. Our immediate priority is the design and establishment of a new service for victims and survivors, which we aim to have in place by 2012.

Dealing with the past has been considered independently and in pilot form through the Commission for Victims and Survivors. The recent debate in the Chamber on dealing with the past illustrated the range of views. We are a post-conflict society, and dealing with the past is a sensitive issue. We will all need to seriously reflect on how we might find a way forward that is sensitive to the many victims and survivors in our society.

For my part, I believe that dialogue on the issue is beneficial. I believe that there is value in making the process objective, inclusive and independent, and that includes working with the Irish Government on the issue. I am conscious that there are other views, and I do not want to be presumptuous or prescriptive in saying today how that discussion takes place, what it

will be about and who will take part. However, it remains the Department's intention to ensure that the voices of victims and survivors are heard, their needs met and their loss acknowledged.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Acting deputy First Minister for his answer. I ask him to reflect on what was contained in the Eames/Bradley report on dealing with the past. Will he and the First Minister address the issue on the basis of that report, so that the office takes a truly comprehensive approach to dealing with the past and no longer ducks the issue but gets stuck in and starts to develop mechanisms that are necessary to deal with the wounds in this society?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. It is certainly not the case that our office is ducking the issue. Dealing with the past is a very important issue that deeply affects individuals and society. We want to ensure that we have the right mechanisms in place for the future.

The Member referred to the Eames/Bradley report. That report was first delivered to the British Government in January 2009. However, I understand that, to date, they have not indicated a way forward in respect of it. I note the comments that the British Secretary of State made about the report at a Conservative Party fringe meeting recently.

I assure the Member that I believe that the way forward needs to be inclusive. I said in my answer that I do not want to be prescriptive in saying today who should or should not be involved in those discussions. However, we want to ensure that the way forward meets the needs of all victims and survivors in society.

Mr McLaughlin: What is the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's (OFMDFM) view about the fact that the Police Ombudsman has announced that he will now leave in January?

Mr O'Dowd: I, for one, welcome the fact that the ombudsman has brought forward the date of his leaving from June to January. I believe that confidence in the Police Ombudsman's office has been rocked and that the office requires a dramatic overhaul to ensure that public confidence is enshrined in a very important part of delivering change to policing in this society and ensuring that the public, regardless of the section of the community or society that they are from, have confidence in the way forward. So, I welcome the fact that the ombudsman is due to leave in January instead of June. It will now be up to OFMDFM, in conjunction with the Justice Minister, to bring forward proposals for his replacement.

Mr Storey: The Acting deputy First Minister referred to public confidence. Will he advise the House on how public confidence in the process can be enhanced on the return of the deputy First Minister, given the fact that when he was giving evidence to the Bloody Sunday inquiry, he claimed that he had taken an oath of secrecy to an illegal organisation, namely the IRA? What are the chances of getting any truth about the past out of the deputy First Minister?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not going to deal with selective commentary or pieces of evidence that may or may not have been given to a tribunal in the past. It is quite clear that everyone will have to play their part in shaping our future. Part of that has to be how we deal with the past. I have no doubt that the deputy First Minister will play his role to ensure that society can move forward to start to deliver a new future for this generation without forgetting the past.

Mr Nesbitt: Does the Minister agree that the current set of mechanisms is incomplete, imperfect and imbalanced, serving to rewrite history by dealing with a specific selection of incidents rather than providing a comprehensive framework?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will be aware that we are seeking a comprehensive framework to deal with the past. Individual parties have put forward proposals. We have the Eames/Bradley report. Individual Governments have put forward their proposals. We require agreement on the way forward. I believe that that is the best way forward. Certainly, as I said to the previous questioner, a comprehensive mechanism to deal with the past will assist us in moving into our future.

Mr Lyttle: Does the Acting deputy First Minister agree with the numerous consultation responses that state that a comprehensive mechanism for dealing with the past will be essential to the successful delivery of the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy?

Mr O'Dowd: I believe that, later on, I will be dealing with another Member's question on the integration strategy. Dealing with the past has proven, unsurprisingly, to be quite a difficult

issue given the sensitivities of survivors and family members who have lost loved ones in the conflict. As politicians, we have to ensure that we are responsible in how we deal with the matter. I am confident that if we approach it in that manner, we will be able to bring forward a comprehensive system that deals with all the past — all our collective pasts — and ensures that we can build towards a new future for society.

Investment Strategy

2. **Mr I McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to summarise what has been achieved under the investment strategy.
(AQO 605/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Our investment strategy has been a critical element in ensuring that the Executive achieve their Programme for Government strategic priorities. Under the strategy, we delivered a record level of new investment of some £5 billion in the three years up to 2010-11. The strategy has helped to improve greatly our capability to deliver major programmes of investment effectively and efficiently. It has allowed Departments to plan ahead with more certainty, which is especially important in taking forward major schemes, such as roads, that are, typically, many years in procurement. It has also helped us to avoid the silo planning of direct rule times by consolidating the capital investment plans for all Departments. In addition, we are now better able to communicate our future needs to the construction industry and local suppliers by helping the industry to plan ahead with more certainty. We are honouring our commitment to support local businesses through these difficult times.

Most importantly, new investment is being delivered in every constituency. We are making huge strides in developing our social, economic and environmental infrastructure, touching every community with investment in schools, health, roads, public transport, the arts, education colleges, social housing and regeneration, and the environment.

Finally, we have made details of our progress to date on our investment commitments available through the Strategic Investment Board's website. In that, we are far ahead of other regions.

Mr I McCrea: The Acting deputy First Minister has gone through a number of issues in the investment strategy and the benefits that it has brought to the people of Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that my constituency will reap the benefits of the new Desertcreat college. Can the Acting deputy First Minister outline when the new investment strategy will be brought forward, or do we have to wait for the return of the deputy First Minister?

Mr O'Dowd: First of all, the Member is quite correct to point out the Desertcreat proposal, in which £139 million is being invested. Listening to sections of the media and reading certain publications, particularly over the weekend, you would nearly believe that the Government are not working at all and that no investment is taking place. The Executive are investing substantial amounts of public money in public structures and in public investment. We are dealing with a very difficult and restricted Budget, but we are setting out a way forward quite clearly and are investing in our public services. The Member will be glad to know that he will not have to wait for the return of the deputy First Minister. Work on the Programme for Government is ongoing, and I believe that that work can be completed sooner rather than later.

In relation to the new investment strategy, it makes sense that that strategy and the Programme for Government are developed jointly, as they marry. Those funds can then be used to deliver on the Programme for Government.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá ceist agam don Aire.

Given the cuts to the capital budgets in the block grant, where are discussions with the British Government in relation to the £18 billion that they said was available for capital investment?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is right to point out that the British Government have, to date, reneged on their commitment of £18 billion as part of the capital investment programme. The Executive have registered disagreement with the British Government over their failure to honour the commitment given by the then Chancellor Gordon Brown. The dispute has been taken forward in accordance with the dispute resolution procedures agreed between the British Government and the devolved Administrations, and a number of meetings have taken place between our officials and those in the Treasury and the Cabinet Office.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister agree that to judge the effectiveness of any investment

strategy, we need to know how many jobs were created and how many of those jobs have survived? Why is Invest NI unable to provide that information? Does the Minister know how many of the 25,000 jobs that were claimed to have been promoted over the past five years were actually created, and how many still exist?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will be aware, and as I said in my original answer, in the three years leading up to 2011, the Executive invested £5 billion into this society in building new infrastructure, new public services, etc. A significant proportion of that money went into the construction industry, and had a ripple effect across society. Therefore, thousands of jobs have been provided. I will ask my officials to forward whatever detailed information we have to the Member. Even though we have polar opposite views on many things, the Member will agree that an investment of £5 billion will have created employment, not only in terms of that investment, but in terms of economic investment going into the future to ensure that this society can move forward. We have to ensure now that the British Government live up to their obligation to this society and return the £18 billion that they removed from our block grant.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that they should ask only one question, not multiple questions. Members who try to ask multiple questions will be ruled out of order.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. An dtig leis an Aire insint dúinn cá mhéad a chaithfear ar an straitéis infheistíochta le linn an Tionóil seo?

How much money will be spent on the investment strategy during the current Assembly mandate?

Mr O'Dowd: I apologise to the Member that I do not have the exact figures in front of me, but I will provide them to him. There is still substantial investment in the Executive budget moving forward. The Executive are also looking at innovative ways to raise capital through disposal of assets, so that we can ensure that we can invest that back into the system. However, I will provide the Member with the detailed figures that he requires.

Common Agricultural Policy

3. **Mr Frew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action they can take to assist the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, when making representations on the common agricultural policy reform proposals at Westminster and in Europe.

(AQO 606/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) will have major implications for the future of the agriculture industry here. Although policy responsibility rests with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister stands ready to assist in any way possible in making representations in Westminster or Brussels.

In the normal run of business, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) makes representations on the common agricultural policy bilaterally through its contacts with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) officials and Whitehall Ministers, influencing British Government policy positions and negotiating lines in the EU Council of Ministers. It is possible for the First Minister and me to raise the issue at the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) Europe. That forum is chaired by the Foreign Secretary or the British Government's Europe Minister and brings together Ministers from the British Government and the devolved Administrations to consider European Union matters that impinge on devolved responsibilities.

The Member will be glad to know that, as recently as 13 October, junior Minister Bell made representations on CAP to the JMC (Europe) on behalf of DARD. At their first set of engagements in Brussels in January 2008, the then First Minister, Dr Paisley, and the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, made a point of meeting the Agriculture Minister to underline the importance of CAP to our region. The First Minister also met the Agriculture and Rural Development Commissioner in Brussels along with the then Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle Gildernew, where the aftermath of the dioxins incident was discussed. European funding was secured at the time to assist the rendering of our culled animals.

2.45 pm

Our Brussels office is available to assist the various Assembly Committees. It has facilitated the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development by setting up meetings and providing meeting rooms. The office is assisting,

where possible, the same Committee to set up Brussels engagements in November.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for his answer, from which it is clear that the Government are very important in — indeed, solely responsible for — the negotiations in Europe around CAP reform.

Given DEFRA's stance on CAP reform, which is not necessarily the same as that of this House and DARD, does the Acting deputy First Minister agree that it is vital that our Minister spearhead any negotiations and contact with our Government in Westminster and not leave it simply to civil servants, capable although they may be.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is absolutely correct. Minister O'Neill has just returned from discussions in Luxembourg on that very matter and is leading the defence of our agriculture industry in Europe.

I agree with the Member that our civil servants are very capable, but it the political responsibility of a Minister to lead on such matters. I have no doubt that Minister O'Neill is doing a good job for agriculture in Brussels. She is meeting DEFRA in the coming days to outline our local position and the importance of the agriculture industry to our economy. Agriculture is one of the few sectors in which business is increasing rather than decreasing in the economic climate. Therefore, it is vital that we defend our agriculture industry. Minister O'Neill and OFMDFM will continue to do that.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Acting deputy First Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it was disappointing to see the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development use this important issue to pursue an all-Ireland agenda?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not exactly sure what the Member refers to. Coming from a rural, agricultural background herself, she will be acutely aware that agriculture does not recognise the border. To develop our agriculture and food industries, working on an all-Ireland basis is of mutual benefit to both sides of the border.

Minister O'Neill is, therefore, quite correct to deal with her Dublin counterpart on the matter. However, she is also dealing with DEFRA, and with Brussels directly. Her focus is on the defence of our agriculture industry and rural communities. She returned from Luxembourg only in recent days. I understand that she is meeting DEFRA in the coming days, so I do not think that she can be accused of ignoring her responsibilities.

Mrs McKevitt: The Acting deputy First Minister has detailed some of the lobbying in which the Department has engaged in advance of the forthcoming European discussions on CAP reform. Can he outline what further representations will be made?

Mr O'Dowd: Representations will continue to be made until the decisions process is closed. It is quite responsible of the Minister, whether she be dealing directly with Brussels, Westminster or Dublin, to highlight the importance of the agriculture industry to this society. Therefore, I have no doubt that the Minister will continue her engagements with all relevant parties, and, if required, OFMDFM is standing ready to provide further assistance.

Commissioner for Children and Young People

4. **Mr McNarry** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what proportion of the funding for the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People is allocated to staffing and accommodation. (AQO 607/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Based on the most recent set of audited accounts, which are for 2010-11, the proportion of funding for the Commissioner for Children and Young People that was allocated to staffing and accommodation was 82·44%. Of that, 62·5% was expenditure on the salaries of staff engaged in service delivery.

The commissioner's office monitors how statutory organisations fulfil their remit for children and young people. Staff employed in the commissioner's office are not direct providers of services, but they do provide front line services, such as legal support and signposting training and research, that are used by children and their parents.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Acting deputy First Minister for that. I noted from an earlier answer that he already admits that the deputy First Minister will return. So thank you very much for the manner in which you have handled questions in your time here and, indeed, for the manner in which you answered that question. Is it acceptable that so much is spent on staffing and accommodation, rather than on actual projects for children?

Mr O'Dowd: Regardless of what happens on Thursday, there will be a deputy First Minister here in the future.

There have been cost reductions across all arm's-length bodies associated with OFMDFM. They face 3% reductions in their overheads. OFMDFM wants to ensure that all its arm's-length bodies and commissioners' offices run effectively and efficiently in providing services to their communities. Therefore, the monitoring of their spend will continue. Where areas of savings are identified, they will be progressed, because we want to ensure that our limited resources are used effectively and efficiently.

Mr Eastwood: What savings are likely to be made through the Children's Commissioner's move to Equality House?

Mr O'Dowd: Although the Children's Commissioner is due to move this year, the savings will not be identified until 2012-13. A full contract has not yet been drawn up between Equality House and the Children's Commissioner, so those savings have not yet been fully identified. However, figures for the use of backroom services, the change of accommodation, etc, will be available in the next audited accounts.

Mr Molloy: What potential is there for any further cost reductions in the office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for that question. Savings have already been identified through several commissions' sharing accommodation and relocating to Equality House. There may be potential for further savings, including through sharing common services such as reception, finance, and human and IT resources. As I said, in Budget 2010, all arm's-length bodies sponsored by OFMDFM were required to find savings of 3% in administration costs. That will deliver savings of £0·49 million, £0·99 million, £1·48 million and £1·97 million over the CSR period.

Social Investment Fund: Consultation

5. **Mr Swann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps they are taking to ensure that people living in deprived areas with a weak community infrastructure have an opportunity to engage fully in the consultation on the social investment fund, given that they are likely to benefit from the fund. (AQO 608/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The First Minister and I launched a public consultation on our proposals for the social investment fund on 27 September. The public consultation will run for 12 weeks, until 23 December 2011, at which time a number of associated events will be held. The full schedule of public events will be advertised in local and regional newspapers. For those who cannot attend the events, the consultation document is available to download from the Department's website, and a questionnaire can be completed online. Hard copies of the document can also be sent out on request by contacting the Department.

We realise that the key will be to encourage all communities to become involved in the consultation process. Therefore, to further promote engagement, we will advertise the consultation widely across the network of health centres, jobs and benefits offices and libraries. That will encourage individuals likely to be impacted directly by the fund to engage with the consultation process. We will also send copies of the consultation document to local councils to share with the elected representatives of disadvantaged areas.

The consultation process will be a valuable time for people to come forward to tell us and the Executive how they believe that the fund can best be used. Our commitment was that it would be an £80 million fund, and we are determined to maintain that. To that end, we have ensured that any moneys not spent in this year will be re-profiled across years 2, 3 and 4 of the CSR period.

Mr Swann: I am sure that the Acting deputy First Minister will accept that there are concerns that the non-representation of groups on bodies has contributed to weak community infrastructure. Neighbourhood renewal partnerships, for example, have not received funding in the past. What actions will his office introduce to prevent that from happening in the future?

Mr O'Dowd: The objective of the fund is to reach communities that are hard pressed. I encourage all elected representatives here to empower the communities that they represent to respond to the consultation process, because that is the stage that we are at. The First Minister and I publicly launched that process and invited a number of groups from the Belfast area. It was organised very quickly, because we wanted to get it into the public domain.

It is up to local representatives as much as OFMDFM to ensure that communities that are disaffected and see a disjoint between themselves and government or, for whatever reason, have been left behind in the past, respond to the consultation, first and foremost. Following the consultation — I am in no way pre-empting its results — it will be up to us to ensure that funding goes to communities that are most hard pressed and to ensure that we start making and delivering changes to people's lives.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given that the social investment fund was designed to address poverty and deprivation, will the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ensure that that policy aligns with existing OFMDFM measures to address those issues?

Mr O'Dowd: OFMDFM is taking the lead in ensuring that social protection fund allocations go to those in need, so there is joined-up thinking. The First Minister and I have already indicated what some of the funding will be used for, and I expect a public announcement on that in the near future. Alongside the social investment fund and the social protection fund, OFMDFM is taking forward a child poverty reduction pilot study and co-ordinating across all Departments to bring forward a child poverty action plan. The social investment fund is a central part of OFMDFM policy. It is not an add-on or an attachment; it is part of a suite of policies designed to tackle poverty and exclusion.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister said that he invited a lot of people to the launch. As I understand it, he did not invite members of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I wonder why. Will the Minister tell the Assembly why and how appointments will be made to the social investment zone area steering groups?

Mr O'Dowd: I assure the Member that the First Minister and I did not set out to exclude members of the Committee. I am of the view that the majority of Members of the Assembly would not be excluded from any room in the Building and could just walk in, because, at the end of the day, they own the Building, so you cannot exclude Members from any room.

As for ensuring that the social investment fund is used to tackle poverty and exclusion, the key point is that there is a public consultation process. It is up to the Member and other Members to ensure that communities respond to that consultation so that their voices are heard. That is where we are today. There is no point in coming into the Chamber and pointing fingers, or whatever may be going on. The key role now for elected representatives is to get out there in the community, make people aware of the project and ensure that they respond to it in detail.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

6. **Ms Gildernew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline progress on the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. (AQO 609/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Work has recently been completed to analyse the many responses that were received during the consultation period on the draft programme for cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI). Copies of the individual consultation responses, an independent analysis report and a response to the consultation were submitted to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 27 September.

That documentation has also been shared with members of a cross-party working group. Party leaders agreed to the establishment of that group in June, and representatives from each of the five main parties were nominated. The group's membership comprises junior Ministers Anderson and Bell, Conall McDevitt of the SDLP, John McCallister of the Ulster Unionist Party and Chris Lyttle of the Alliance Party. The group held its first meeting on 27 September and has since met weekly. At its most recent meeting, members received a presentation by the independent consultant who carried out the analysis of the consultation. The working group will use that information as it considers the detail of the consultation responses, and will set out the way forward in due course.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat. There has been quite a bit of departmental support for good relations. Will the Minister outline, for example, the shared education programme that has been developed in Fermanagh and which is no longer going to be funded? Could that be funded under the CSI strategy?

3.00 pm

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware, through my education role, of the programme in Fermanagh to which the Member refers. I am also aware that The Atlantic Philanthropies are involved in that programme. It would be wrong of me to state what, if any, programmes are to be funded in future. We have to ensure that the CSI strategy is completed. The five-member working group comprises all parties, which makes it more difficult to know who leaked the document to the papers; that was unhelpful. It is important that the group completes its work and we move on to the next stage.

Employment and Learning

St Mary's University College, Belfast

1. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's response to the report produced by the Strategic Investment Board on behalf of St Mary's University College, Belfast, on the sustainability of the college. (AQO 618/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): It is my understanding that the Strategic Investment Board engaged with St Mary's and facilitated the work carried out by the PA Consulting Group, which resulted in the report published in December 2010. At that stage, my Department acknowledged the report, as it was not appropriate for it to comment, given that the report had not been formally adopted by the college's governing body. The report made several assumptions about required future student numbers and brought forward proposals to reduce costs, diversify and increase income to ensure the sustainability of the college. The college is working in a challenging environment, and I welcome the comprehensive nature of the analysis, which informed the production of the institutional plan agreed by the college's governing body in June 2011. I believe that the institutional plan will be published by the college at some point. My officials and I are engaging with the college on its sustainability, building on my recent meetings with members of the governing body and senior management of the college.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle agus a Aire. St Mary's is a great educational linchpin in west Belfast. Will the Minister state whether he is committed to supporting the sustainability of St Mary's University College as an autonomous further education institution? Furthermore, will he consider increasing the college's allocation of students of liberal arts?

Dr Farry: I am very conscious of the importance of St Mary's in the context of the West Belfast constituency. As the Member will be aware, a number of issues pertain to the future of teacher training in Northern Ireland, and I am giving active consideration to them all. Many of those issues have been raised in the House, and there are other aspects to consider. I will be meeting a number of stakeholder groups. Indeed, in the very near future, I will, again, meet Mr Maskey and his colleague Sue Ramsey, along with the principal of St Mary's. I look forward to that engagement.

Mr S Anderson: Does the Minister regard the report on St Mary's College as having any bearing on the proposed merger of Stranmillis College and Queen's University?

Dr Farry: The House will appreciate that there is an outstanding issue in relation to the merger of Stranmillis and Queen's University, which was the subject of a consultation by my Department. I am considering the way forward on that alongside related policy issues to do with the wider framework of teacher training as it relates to my Department. I look forward to bringing some proposals on that to the House in the very near future.

Mr McDevitt: I wonder whether the Minister has reflected on the viability audit process that his colleague the Minister of Education is undertaking and whether he thinks that such a process would be very useful for higher education institutions in Northern Ireland.

Dr Farry: I assure Mr McDevitt that I reflect on many issues. There is much to reflect on in Northern Ireland. In considering viability, we have many higher education institutions, not just the two universities. The teacher training and further education colleges are also higher education institutions. My immediate focus and priority are on ensuring that the teacher training system in Northern Ireland is sustainable. All the other institutions are certainly viable and will play a fundamental role in future investment in the economy of Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister accept that the devotion of St Mary's to its distinct Catholic ethos and its determination to stay outside any merger proposals in the higher education sector work adversely to the interests of Stranmillis, which finds itself the object of pressure for a merger from which St Mary's appears to be exempt?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Allister for the question. It is important that we are all conscious of the differences in the approaches of Stranmillis and St Mary's, both of which are autonomous bodies. The board of governors of Stranmillis has unanimously requested the merger with Queen's University, while the current position of St Mary's is to remain a separate body. At the risk of repeating myself, I am conscious of the wider dimensions that relate to policy on teacher training. I am actively considering a range of issues, and I urge the House to be patient. I should be back in the very near future to set out the way forward.

Schools: Ballymoney Learning Community

2. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has met with the Minister of Education in relation to the Ballymoney Learning Community proposal to create a shared sixth form. (AQO 619/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have not met the Minister of Education about the Ballymoney Learning Community proposal to create a shared sixth form, but I meet the Minister regularly to consider issues of mutual interest. At our latest meeting on 5 October, we discussed the role that both Departments have to play in the provision of a broad and balanced choice of courses for 14- to 19-year-olds that meets their needs, interests and career aspirations. For school pupils, that can be delivered through collaboration among schools, further education colleges and training providers under the entitlement framework. That provides the flexibility to offer pupils a focused curriculum, and it is about schools and colleges putting the needs of young people at the core of their thinking. Further education colleges can offer schools access to high-quality applied courses that are delivered in state-of-the-art facilities and led by industry experts, which are things that schools cannot normally provide.

Both Departments are committed to ensuring that all young people have the opportunity through the education and training system to fulfil their potential. Linked with that is the need to develop a highly skilled, flexible and innovative workforce that will contribute to the twin goals of economic success and social inclusion. Both Departments recognise that better value for money and an enriched educational experience can be achieved through reduced duplication and the best use of existing resources in the school, further education and training systems. Consequently, the further education colleges are actively involved with area learning communities in the strategic planning of local education provision. Therefore, the Northern Regional College will be keen to work alongside and add value to whatever sixth-form school structure emerges in the Ballymoney area.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he share my concern that the process in which we have been engaged for some time to formulate a common sixth form in the Ballymoney area can still lead to a duplication of provision in the Coleraine and Ballymoney campuses of the Northern Regional College? Given the concerns about the future of the Ballymoney campus vis-à-vis a new capital build, will he assure the House that students will be offered the best possible menu of courses at no disadvantage to any school in the area?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Storey for his supplementary. I am extremely committed to avoiding duplication in public expenditure. It is important that we stress that the ultimate importance in all this is the experience for students and ensuring that they have full access to the range of choices without any barriers being put in their way. I am conscious of the concerns that have been raised about the future of the Ballymoney campus. I am not in the business of taking individual decisions about rationalisation outside the context of the outline business case, which is what I am seeking from the Northern Regional College. However, that will be some time away.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree with me about the importance of ensuring that we have post-16 pathways for our young people who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET)? What actions has he taken to ensure that young people have those possibilities?

Dr Farry: I thank Caitríona Ruane for her supplementary. It is important that we reflect

on the range of necessary interventions. We have already mentioned the entitlement framework, which relates more to the formal education system. My Department is working in conjunction with the Department of Education on the 14-to-19 framework. I hope that we will be in a position to announce those high-level principles in the very near future.

My Department also leads on behalf of the Executive on NEETs. As the Member will be aware, we had a comprehensive consultation on that in recent months. Indeed, the Committee for Employment and Learning conducted an investigation. We will bring forward formal proposals on that strategy to the Executive in the very near future, probably in early 2012.

DEL: Shared Future

3. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he is taking to promote a shared future within his Department.

(AQO 620/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am strongly committed to the creation of a shared and integrated society in Northern Ireland. Every Minister has a duty to promote a shared future, both individually and through collective action by the Executive. I am in discussions with officials in my Department with a view to creating a form of shared future policy proofing. In addition to current forms of policy proofing, that mechanism will be applied to all future departmental policies to assess whether they contribute positively to a shared society or inadvertently reinforce divisions or provide services on a segregated basis. Policies that tend towards separation will be avoided, while those that are neutral or positively advance a shared future will be favoured. That policy tool will be broader than the current good relations aspect of equality proofing. I believe that those changes would represent a groundbreaking development in the policymaking process and would demonstrate a solid commitment to a shared future by my Department. Hopefully, it would be an example to others.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his very positive response to my question, and I congratulate him on developing such a good policy on good relations. What issues or problems do his Department and unemployed people face in promoting a shared future?

Dr Farry: I thank Anna Lo for her question and, indeed, for her welcome for my announcement. Shared future issues and the consequences of division can affect all our Departments in a range of areas. In my Department, a number of areas spring to mind. We mentioned teacher training at the beginning of these questions to my Department. There are also issues with some distortions in the provision of support to people who are outside employment in that there is some duplication of services. In effect, some of our facilities may be geared towards one or other section of the community, not by design but because of how use has developed over time. We need to be mindful of that in how we develop future work programmes.

I am particularly interested in trying to address labour mobility in Northern Ireland. In a general sense, we have the problem of how far people are prepared to go to access work opportunities, and I believe that an aspect of that is linked to divisions on the ground. There is evidence that some people are unwilling to move out of certain areas into others for work. That is a lost opportunity to the economy as a whole, and it impacts on individual opportunities. We need to tackle that.

Mr Eastwood: What steps does the Minister think he can take to promote applications to the Magee campus of the University of Ulster from students from Protestant backgrounds?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Eastwood for that question. It is important to take the opportunity to stress that all our universities are open to all sections of the community and that both the University of Ulster and Queen's are committed to tackling any chill factors, whether they are actual or perceived. I believe that all the universities have neutral environments. There may well be wider issues in society that we have to address to encourage a wider balance of applications. It is also important that we interrogate the data on the people who are coming forward for higher education. The notion that there is skewing in whether people go to one place or the other because of the tradition that they come from is, in many senses, misunderstood and significantly exaggerated.

Mr Molloy: Being mindful of the exhibition that the further education colleges gave in the Building today, can the Minister guarantee that the resources will be spread across the

community to ensure that the further education colleges can deliver west of the Bann?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Molloy for that question, and I am happy to assure the House that I am wholly committed to ensuring that we spend our resources fairly and equitably. What I said applies to all members of the Executive and is very much part of the Pledge of Office and the ministerial code.

3.15 pm

Mr Molloy raised the issue of the showcase of further education. That gives me the opportunity to highlight and celebrate the real achievements of our further education system in how it supports business and takes forward a lot of quality innovation. With regard to world skills, we had people from Northern Ireland who went on and achieved world standards. Indeed, the world champion gold medallist in bricklaying comes from Northern Ireland, and we have other medallists. That is a testament to the strength and depth of our young people and to the investment of further education in such vocational training.

Mr Kinahan: There was a great deal in the Minister's initial answer that I look forward to hearing more about. Which approach to a shared future does the Minister favour: integration or sharing of resources?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Kinahan for his question. I do not see sharing and integration as being polar opposites; they are very much part of a continuum of things that we can do. Any movement in the direction of sharing will be beneficial. In many respects, the much more integrated approach is more beneficial socially, economically and financially. We also have a lot to gain from other sharing models that may fall short of integration.

Essential Skills for Living

4. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the effectiveness of the Essential Skills for Living strategy. (AQO 621/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Essential Skills for Living strategy, which was launched in 2002, has been effective in a number of ways in addressing the literacy, numeracy and ICT needs of adults in Northern Ireland. To date, over 71,600 individuals have achieved over 128,500 qualifications in the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. That has provided learners with the skills they need to progress at home and at work. In addition, the strategy is successfully targeting harder-to-reach adults, with 31% of enrolments coming from the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. Given the harder-to-reach cohort that the programme targets, it is particularly gratifying that the retention and achievement rates for Essential Skills are 90% and 69% respectively. That compares very favourably with the performance of other further education courses on offer.

Recent research by Oxford Economics concluded that progress on adult literacy and numeracy rates in Northern Ireland is advancing very well in comparison with our counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales. Significantly, the cost per qualification has reduced progressively from around £900 in 2004-05 to just over £350 in 2010-11.

I recognise the importance of addressing the essential skills needs of older learners, and it is encouraging to note that the number of those aged over 25 who enrol for essential skills provision continues to increase. My Department has worked closely with the Northern Ireland digital hub and broadcasters to support campaigns aimed at older learners. I also recently met the acting Commissioner for Older People to consider effective ways to reach older people who do not normally engage with any arm of government or learning provision. My Department will continue to monitor the participation of older learners in that important provision. Therefore, although more remains to be done, the Essential Skills for Living strategy has been a success story in Northern Ireland.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister very much for his in-depth answer. What common ground exists between literacy and numeracy problems in schools and in the adult population, and what is being done to bring the respective action plans together?

Dr Farry: This is an area that cuts across two Departments, and I imagine that the Minister of Education would be much better placed than I to address the sentiments raised by Mr Gardiner. However, it is important to recognise that the actions and interventions that we have in primary and secondary education go a long way to shaping the environment that my Department will, in turn, address with those over 16 years old.

Investment in essential skills is also critically important to our economy. In this increasingly competitive age, it is important that we invest in skills across a broad spectrum. Where people are being left out of the labour market through an absence of essential skills, it is a loss to our economy as well as being a loss of opportunity for the individuals concerned.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé, agus seo í mo cheist. How have training organisations in the region that promote skill-based learning been affected by the recession? What knock-on effect has that had on learners?

Dr Farry: It is important to stress that the commitment of my Department to funding of Essential Skills remains. It is a priority for me. I do not think that the demand context that we face will be overly affected by a recession or the lack of one. It has much deeper historical roots in our society, and it will be a priority for my Department in the current economic situation and, indeed, into the future as our economy begins to improve and grow.

Labour Relations Agency: Temporary Workers

5. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many complaints were made to the Labour Relations Agency by temporary workers in the current year. (AQO 622/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Labour Relations Agency (LRA) operates a helpline service to answer queries from the public about employment rights and responsibilities, including those of temporary workers. It also offers conciliation in workplace disputes that could form or already have formed the basis for complaint to an industrial tribunal or to the Fair Employment Tribunal. Although the agency records and publishes statistical information on both services, the collated information is not disaggregated in such a way as to identify instances in which temporary workers have availed themselves of the respective services. The Agency Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 are due to come into operation on 5 December and will provide additional protections for temporary agency workers. It is not anticipated that the LRA will receive any complaints in relation to this legislation until some time after it has come into operation.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer, but I am somewhat disappointed that the information asked for is not readily available. The Minister will agree that temporary workers have been treated shamefully, not just by the private sector but by the public sector. Can he outline the extent of sanctions that are now available to people who find themselves with no workers' rights at all?

Dr Farry: The problems identified by Mr Dallat perhaps give some of the context as to why we have recently put in place the agency workers regulations and why we have transposed that European directive to Northern Ireland. We did so to give agency workers that type of protection in the workplace, where, in effect, they are treated on a par with existing employees. However, in Northern Ireland, we have sought an appropriate balance between the rights of agency workers and the needs of business, and that is why we followed practice in the rest of the United Kingdom in having the initial 12-week derogation before the terms of that directive apply. However, this way forward is a major win, both for business and the agency workers, and will go a long way to addressing the concerns that Mr Dallat has outlined.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I say to Members that they need to continually rise in their place. Some Members have a great difficulty. As soon as the Minister sits down, Members should be on their feet. If we all do that, we will all get there.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat. What steps is the Minister's Department taking to ensure a better working environment and harmonisation between employees, employers and heads of colleges? Does he acknowledge that there are difficulties?

Dr Farry: I will rise and sit down a bit more slowly to give Members a bit more of a chance. I suspect that the Member is referring to a particular instance, but I will refer to the generality and say that we all need to be mindful of that, whether in the public sector or the private sector. No one gains from disputes or lack of harmony in the workplace, and, where employers and employees work in one direction, we all stand to benefit. I am more than happy for my Department to provide leadership in that regard. Indeed, the Labour Relations Agency stands ready to assist businesses with advice to provide improvements in the workplace and to ensure that we avoid a situation where disputes arise in the first

place, because disputes are more costly to the economy and to the businesses affected.

Mr Copeland: I, too, congratulate the Minister on the opaqueness of his answer thus far.

Does the Minister accept that, even though labour flexibility is without doubt an essential component of a modern, market-led manufacturing economy, it is still essential that the legislation protects all workers?

Dr Farry: Yes, very much so. I am fully committed to growing a dynamic economy, and I appreciate the importance of labour flexibility. I also support the equal treatment of workers. That is why we struck the particular balance that we did with the Agency Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 in respecting the need for some flexibility in the labour market while extending to temporary workers the rights that permanent workers enjoy.

Northern Regional College: Magherafelt Campus

6. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his plans for the Northern Regional College, Magherafelt campus.

(AQO 623/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Northern Regional College has submitted a preliminary business case to my Department that makes strategic recommendations about accommodation needs across its campuses. The business case has taken a high-level view and will be followed by a more in-depth examination of those needs. The preliminary business case recommends that the Magherafelt campus should continue to be a delivery point for the Northern Regional College's further education programmes.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's confirmation. At an event in the Long Gallery earlier, I took the opportunity to speak to some people from the Northern Regional College. There had been some concern that, with the closure of the Antrim campus, some of the others would be under threat. However, I am glad of the Minister's confirmation on that issue. Will the Minister agree to ensure that, whatever training is available, the people of mid-Ulster — certainly the Magherafelt side of the constituency — will be able to avail themselves of as many courses as possible to ensure that their training needs are fully met?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCrea for his supplementary question. The Northern Regional College is getting a very good outing today. It is important to stress that individual campuses of colleges across Northern Ireland will provide a general range of services as well as specialising in certain courses. I look forward to having a situation where there is a free exchange of people. Magherafelt campus should not be seen as servicing only the local community or, indeed, mid-Ulster; it should be seen as part of the wider network of the Northern Regional College. In the same way as the Magherafelt campus attracts people from other parts of the catchment area, people from Magherafelt may go to other campuses to avail themselves of opportunities there.

It is also important to stress that, although, thus far, all seems fine for Magherafelt, we still await the full outline business case from the Northern Regional College. I see that Mr McCrea is encouraged, and I do not want to discourage him in any way. However, that will come forward in due course, and one would hope that that will be reflected in its future recommendations.

Mrs Overend: I am glad that I am getting my question in before the time is up. I have met local secondary-level students at the Magherafelt campus who are working towards GCSE qualifications on vocational subjects such as bricklaying, joinery, hairdressing and beauty. Can the Minister outline what plans he has, if any, to further enhance, develop and fund links with the Department of Education and, specifically, local secondary schools in that area?

Dr Farry: I cannot comment on the specific nature of the learning communities emerging in mid-Ulster, but I can say that my Department has made a commitment to the entitlement framework whereby further education will work in conjunction with the secondary system. Again, I stress that we hope to broaden that out in the very near future to the beginnings of the 14-to-19 strategy for Northern Ireland, which will see joint working between the two Departments on a broader range of issues affecting that cohort of young people.

Mr Byrne: Is the Minister aware of the PwC report on employment practices at the North West Regional College, and does he have a view on the seriousness of the matters therein?

Dr Farry: As the Speaker is wont to say, I think that the question has grown legs. I am aware of the issues that Mr Byrne refers to. PwC, the

internal auditor of the North West Regional College, has commissioned a report, which is in draft form. We look forward to seeing the conclusions of that report in the near future and what the way forward will be. I am aware of the issues that have been raised by the Member and other Members from the wider north-west political family.

3.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Forensic Science Services

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

> *That this Assembly notes with concern the pressure and backlog in Forensic Science Northern Ireland; further notes the cuts to the Forensic Science Service on the UK mainland and the impact that this is having on Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Justice to provide the necessary resources to ensure that cases requiring forensics are processed efficiently. — [Mr Craig.]*

Which amendment was: At end insert

> *"; and further calls on the Minister to explore the possible development of an all-island framework for forensic science, to ensure that all resources are used to the maximum benefit of the victims of crime and the criminal justice systems both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland." — [Mr McDevitt.]*

Question, That the amendment be made, put and negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes with concern the pressure and backlog in Forensic Science Northern Ireland; further notes the cuts to the Forensic Science Service on the UK mainland and the impact that this is having on Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Justice to provide the necessary resources to ensure that cases requiring forensics are processed efficiently.*

Mr Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease for a few moments.

Ministerial Statement

Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister of Finance and Personnel wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I apologise. I was waiting for a vote to be called, and that did not happen: hence my late arrival.

I thank you for the opportunity to update the Assembly on the outcome of the 2011-12 October monitoring round. Before going into the detail of the monitoring round transactions, I would like to set out the wider context for this round.

Members will be aware that I agreed a new Budget exchange system with the Chief Secretary over the summer. The scheme allows the Executive to carry forward end of year underspends up to a capped level of 0·6% of resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) and 1·5% of capital DEL. In money terms, that equates to some £50 million on the resource side and £12 million on the capital side. It is a much more advantageous scheme for the Executive than that imposed on us last year, when we were not allowed any end of year carry-over of resources.

Since we now have access to the new end of year flexibility scheme, and with the move to three monitoring rounds a year, the October monitoring round assumes much greater significance. It is at this point that the Executive must begin to form a view on how they position themselves with regard to planning to carry resources into the next financial year. The final confirmation of that position will be adopted at the next and final monitoring round in January.

Given the likely budgetary pressures in the next financial year, the Executive have agreed that they will endeavour to carry forward into next year the maximum amounts allowable under the Budget exchange scheme. However, that will not be an easy task to achieve, since financial management is not an exact science.

There has also been a change in the way in which the financial information associated with monitoring rounds is presented. Her Majesty's Treasury's public expenditure control framework distinguishes between ring-fenced and non-ring-fenced resource expenditure. The ring-fenced element relates to depreciation and impairments and is tightly controlled by HM Treasury. The Executive have no discretion to move resources out of that category. The Budget exchange scheme, which has been agreed with Her Majesty's Treasury, operates within that framework. Therefore, the key focus must now be on the non-ring-fenced element of resource expenditure, since that is the component directly managed by the Executive. For that reason, the tables attached to the written version of my statement focus on the non-ring-fenced resource element as well as the capital investment. The ring-fenced resource position is set out in a single, separate table.

The starting point for the October monitoring round was the outcome of the June monitoring round, which concluded with an overcommitment of £21·2 million in capital investment and, in resource expenditure, with an overcommitment of £45·8 million in respect of the non-ring-fenced element and an undercommitment of £1·9 million in respect of the ring-fenced components. As I have said, the Executive's focus in relation to resource expenditure is the non-ring-fenced element.

Departments surrendered £49·9 million in non-ring-fenced resource expenditure and £25 million in respect of capital investment. Details of those reduced requirements are included in the tables at the end of the written version of my statement.

There is a relatively high level of reduced requirements, which suggests that Departments are already realising savings. Attached to the written version of my statement, with the tables, is a comparison of the administration expenditure position between the start of the year and the October monitoring position. That shows that, overall, Northern Ireland Departments have reduced their administration expenditure by 2·5% this year. That suggests that Departments are already beginning to re-focus their expenditure to the delivery of key front line services.

In addition to the reduced requirements that I have just mentioned, the Executive received a Barnett consequential of £22·6 million non-ring-fenced resource from Her Majesty's Treasury. That was our share of the Government's decision to increase the government grant to fund a freeze in UK council tax.

For Members' information, £36·7 million of ring-fenced expenditure was also surrendered. Those are resources that are not available for allocation by the Executive. The ring-fenced position is set out separately in the tables that are attached to the written version of this statement.

I turn now to the internal reallocations and reclassifications. With a highly constrained resource position, it is essential that Departments seek to manage any emerging pressures in their existing allocations before bringing forward bids for additional expenditure. I welcome any such proactive actions by Ministers in managing emerging pressures.

Although the public expenditure control framework allows Departments the scope to undertake many such movements on a unilateral basis, proposed movements in excess of the de minimis threshold of £1 million are subject to the Executive's approval. In some instances, Departments have also sought to move allocations across spending areas to facilitate the transfer of responsibility for a particular function from one business area to another. When such movements exceed the de minimis threshold, they need Executive agreement.

In addition to proactive movement of resources, there are some departmental allocations that, for technical reasons, were incorrectly classified. The main reclassification was £50 million in respect of the Presbyterian Mutual Society hardship fund. That was initially classified as resource, but the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has now confirmed that its correct budgeting treatment should be capital investment. However, that £50 million reclassification will not represent a pressure on the capital investment side and a corresponding easement on the resource side because my officials intend to agree — indeed, we have already agreed — an adjustment to the Executive's control totals with Her Majesty's Treasury.

Furthermore, there are instances in which Departments reclassified amounts between the ring-fenced and non-ring-fenced resource expenditure categories. That is permissible only when the overall Treasury control totals have not been breached. In this monitoring round, £5·6 million was reclassified between the ring-fenced and non-ring-fenced categories. All those proactive movements and reclassifications have been included in the tables that accompany the written version of this statement.

I now turn to the resources that are available. All the above issues impact on the effective overcommitment that the Executive will need to manage in the remaining months of this financial year. The net impact of all those issues is that the Executive had £34·3 million of non-ring-fenced resource expenditure and £1·7 million of capital investment available for allocation. It was in this financial context that the Executive considered departmental bids for resources. Departments submitted bids for additional resources of £90·1 million for non-ring-fenced resource expenditure and £51·6 million for capital investment. The individual bids by Department are shown in the tables that are attached to the written version of this statement.

The levels of allocations agreed by the Executive in this round are partly informed by the quality of the departmental bids and partly by a judgement on the final level of overcommitment to be carried forward into the January monitoring round. The Executive have agreed a number of significant allocations, and I would like to highlight some of those. First, the Executive agreed to allocate £25 million to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), which consisted of £20 million of resource and £5 million of capital. The additional resource expenditure allocations were influenced by the emerging findings of the ongoing performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) review. As Members will recall, a key issue during the Budget debate was the amount of resources that were committed to our health service. A key emerging finding of the PEDU review is that there is not a sufficient case to top-slice resources from other Departments to provide additional funding for the health service. However, the Health Minister is committed to realising significant savings in the years ahead. That will be challenging, and, in that context, the Executive recognised that there was a strong case for providing additional support to the health sector now.

Some £15 million of the resource allocation will help the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to implement an invest-to-save scheme, which will free up resources in future years through a limited programme of voluntary redundancies. That scheme will be targeted carefully on non-essential posts, and it will alleviate pressure on the Northern

Ireland block in the coming years. The Executive also acknowledged the pressing need to provide £5 million of immediate budgetary cover to allow for the purchase of specialist drugs.

The Executive have also agreed a £13·1 million allocation to the Department for Regional Development (DRD), which will allow it to maintain the concessionary fares scheme for bus services. It will also provide significant resources towards maintaining and improving our road network, which will, of course, also provide a boost for our local construction sector.

3.45 pm

A total of £12 million of capital investment was allocated to the Department for Social Development (DSD), £10 million of which will go towards an affordable housing assistance scheme for some 170 first-time buyers. In recognition of the ongoing problems in relation to affordable housing and the difficulties that first-time buyers face in obtaining finance, the Executive also agreed that the additional injection of £10 million should continue in each of the remaining years of the Budget period. That will be on top of the £15 million already allocated to the co-ownership scheme. Let us not forget that there is also a mortgage element to those purchases. In order to maximise the positive impact of the initiative, I recently met local banks and building societies to discuss how they could play their part in the initiative and was pleased with the broad support expressed.

The local lending institutions have confirmed to me that they have the money to lend and the mortgage products available for those seeking to purchase a home under the scheme. That is particularly good news for the many hundreds of people who have been waiting and who have been involved in the lottery scheme in the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association for the past year. The increase in funding announced today is evidence of the Executive's commitment to help people to take their first steps on the property ladder and will stimulate much-needed activity in the local property market. It is also good news for the construction industry in Northern Ireland. I hope that this initiative will stimulate the sale of additional new houses, revitalise the local housing market and support employment in a sector that has been badly affected by the slowdown in the housing market.

The residual £2 million that has been allocated to the Department for Social Development will allow the Housing Executive to carry out further thermal improvements to its housing stock. The additional funding will allow improvements to be carried out on an additional 450 dwellings. That will not only create additional jobs but will improve energy efficiency and help us to attack and to achieve our targets on fuel poverty.

The Executive agreed to allocate £11·7 million to the Department of Education. That will provide £10 million of funding towards the maintenance of our schools and fund the extension of the integrated services for children and young people programme for the remainder of this financial year.

The outcome of those transactions is that the Executive conclude this monitoring round with an overcommitment of £11·5 million in respect of non-ring-fenced resource expenditure and £23·8 million in capital investment.

A number of the outstanding issues that are impacting on the Executive's position need to be progressed. As Members will be aware, the Executive have tasked the asset management unit of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) with delivering £10 million in additional capital receipts this financial year. It is important that those receipts be realised because failure to do so will mean an additional pressure for the Executive to address in the last monitoring round of this year. Equally, progress needs to be made on allocating the funding held centrally in respect of the social protection fund, the social investment fund and the childcare strategy.

Moreover, the Executive agreed to allocate £1·4 million to the Assembly to cover a pressure resulting from the continuing failure to sell Ormiston House in this financial year. It is imperative that the Assembly progresses that sale in the next financial year and makes the funding available for allocation by the Executive. We need that funding to be channelled towards front line service delivery.

I am fully aware that trading conditions are still very difficult for businesses; unemployment remains stubbornly high, and families are finding it difficult to cope with recent high inflation. The Executive have allocated in excess of £70 million to Departments in this monitoring round. Those allocations will have a material, positive impact on our public services and many of them will create further jobs and enhance economic

activity, which will provide a much-needed boost for our economy. I have also announced further help for first-time buyers. That is supported by a commitment from banks and building societies to make lending available and to ensure that the positive effects of the scheme are maximised.

For those reasons, I commend the monitoring round to the Assembly.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a thabhairt don Aire.

I thank the Minister for his statement and for the opportunity to discuss it with him earlier. Given the need to avoid handing back vital resources to the Treasury, how confident is the Minister that the reduced requirements identified by Departments are based on robust forecasts and that the underspend caps will not be exceeded? To what extent has his Department validated those forecasts? Also, what assurances are there that the money that has been reallocated in this monitoring round will be spent by the end of the year?

Mr Wilson: I will deal with the second part of his questions first. We have looked at the bids, and some of them have, in fact, been reduced. For example, we allocated £2 million for thermal improvements to Housing Executive houses, but the paper shows that the original bid was for £4 million. We have taken a cautious approach and said, "Look, we believe that £2 million can be spent. If, by February, it is shown that that money has been spent and that a further £2 million can be spent, then the money will be made available". We have not given the full amount of bids where we have thought that there is even the least risk that the money could not be spent.

As far as the first question is concerned: we still have an overcommitment. We have the ability to carry £62 million over to next year. Between that overcommitment and the ability to carry over, I am convinced that we will be able to absorb whatever resources are surrendered in February. Of course, even that late in the year, there will be schemes that are capable of spending money and on which the Executive may deem it worthwhile to spend.

Mr McQuillan: Does the Minister believe that the allocations in this monitoring round will assist the construction sector?

Mr Wilson: I have no doubt that they will. Look at some of the things that we are spending money on. First, there is school maintenance, which tends to be fairly labour-intensive and the kind of work that goes to small local firms. The money on roads improvements and maintenance will, again, help the civil engineering part of the construction industry. Also, the money allocated to the co-ownership scheme will enable another 170 people to purchase a house in this financial year. Next year, co-ownership will have an additional £10 million on top of its £15 million. I believe that that will help to stimulate the construction of new homes. Given that many new houses have a starting price of between £85,000 and £135,000, it is good news not only for the construction industry but for those who want to get on the property ladder.

Mrs Overend: It appears that £1·7 million is being committed to funding the extension of the integrated services for children and young people programme. What type of front line services can expect to benefit from that funding?

Mr Wilson: As is true of many of the bids made, it will be up to the Minister of Education to outline that detail. We get the broad indication of what the money is to be spent on, but the detailed arrangements, such as where it will go and the kind of schools that will benefit, are the Education Minister's responsibility.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas.

I happen to agree with the Minister that progress needs to be made on allocating the remaining funding held centrally in respect of the social protection fund, the social investment fund and the childcare strategy. Indeed, many groups in the community, including childcare groups, are teetering on the brink because of the tardiness in allocating such funding. On top of his statement, what additional pressure can the Minister bring to bear to ensure that the allocation of those funds is expedited?

Mr Wilson: First, it should be recognised that those are new schemes, some of which had to go out to consultation. That consultation is ongoing, and OFMDFM has taken what I believe to be a responsible step by surrendering some money at this stage. The challenge that I set down in the statement is that the money being held at the centre for those purposes should be spent in the remainder of this year.

I think that the Member would agree that the last thing that we want is OFMDFM to simply say, "Rather than have the embarrassment of handing back the money, let us just allocate it willy-nilly, even if that is not done in a strategic way". As a result of our successful negotiations with Treasury, if the money is not spent, there will be an opportunity in the February monitoring round to give that back to the centre so that it can be carried over to next year. Since it is a policy commitment, we obviously want to see the money being spent as soon as possible. However, I do not think that any Member of the Assembly would want that money to be spent without there being proper arrangements in place. There is no point in that.

Ms Lo: Mr Bradley took the question out of my mouth. I want to ask the Minister about the childcare strategy in particular. This has been ongoing for the past six years. However, you are now telling community groups and women's groups to spend that amount of money within six months.

Mr Wilson: First, the Member has to understand what the purpose of today's statement is. It is about looking at the money that is being returned to the Department and reallocated to other Departments. Some of the money for the childcare strategy is still held by OFMDFM. So, it is really its responsibility to make sure that that money is spent responsibly. Just because there are only six months left in this financial year does not mean that it is not possible to allocate that money to groups in a meaningful way. However, I emphasise that if the money cannot be allocated because of administrative or technical difficulties, I would prefer it if it came back so that it was available next year to spend in a responsible way rather than it being spent in a way that does not actually meet the strategic objectives that have been set for it.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement to the House. I welcome the statement. I want to take this opportunity to wish the Minister well in his deliberations later on today. I hope that success is delivered at Westminster.

How do the alterations to the Budget exchange system, suggested by the Minister today, improve the situation financially for the people of Northern Ireland and benefit Northern Ireland plc?

Mr Wilson: The main advantage is clear. At the end of the last financial year, any money that was declared as a reduced requirement in the February monitoring round, because it could not be spent by Departments, was lost. As it turned out, we returned very little. I cannot remember the exact amount, but it was probably in the bracket of between £4 million and £5 million. Under the new arrangement, we can now carry forward £62 million from one year to the next, which means that there is less pressure simply to get rid of money declared as surplus in February, as tended to be the case when it could not be carried forward. That money, therefore, was not spent in a very strategic way and probably was not spent on the things that we wanted to spend it on. So, the main advantage of the arrangement is that it gives us that budget flexibility.

Of course, I would much prefer it if Departments would actually fulfil their spending plans in the year in which those have been set. However, if that cannot be done for some reason, I would far rather that the money was available to us to spend in a much more controlled and strategic way the following year.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Aire agus a chairde. The Minister said that he has met officials from banks and building societies in recent times, and he seems quite pleased about the fact that they have come forward to say that they have money to lend. However, I am concerned about the fact that they have told us all that before. I have met some developers and people who are trying to get into the property market, and they have told me that they are still having difficulties with the banks. Reports are coming into the Assembly about the fact that there have been difficulties. So, will the Minister join me in calling on the banks and lenders to come to the Assembly on a regular basis to let us know how the situation is progressing? If people are telling us one thing and the banks are telling us something different, let us find out who is telling the truth.

Mr Wilson: The Member makes a very important point. There really is little point in our putting money into the co-ownership scheme if the banks will not lend people the other half of the money or whatever percentage of the purchase price is required to get a mortgage.

For that reason, after questions on my statement have finished, representatives from the banks will be in the Building to make a commitment in briefings to the press on their willingness to participate in the co-ownership scheme, to make

money available through it and to work with the scheme to ensure that there is no duplication in the way in which applications are processed. We have discussed some issues with officials. For example, if the co-ownership scheme does some vetting, do banks need to delay the process by conducting exactly the same vetting and laying down the same conditions as apply for loans?

4.00 pm

Of course, we are talking about only one aspect of bank lending. All I can say is that in engagements that Nelson McCausland, the Minister for Social Development, and I have had with the banks between making the decision and announcing it today, we found most of them to be positive. However, the Member is correct: we have made it clear to the banks that not only do we want them to commit today and to advertise the products that they will make available to people who apply for co-ownership but we will monitor how that is delivered.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his statement. There will now be only three monitoring rounds each year, and he mentioned the importance and significance of the October monitoring round. Will he share the details of that?

Mr Wilson: At present, money that is declared surplus to requirements can still be put into programmes that probably fit in with the Budget — Departments' main strategic programmes — and money can still be spent in the last six months of the year. That is why the October monitoring round is so important. In the February monitoring round, we look either for emergency spending that can be undertaken or for money that, although it was planned to spend it this year, will not be spent and will simply be carried forward into next year, which is why the October monitoring round is so important. It still allows reduced requirements from Departments to be allocated for strategic spending in this particular year.

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

The other reason why it is important this year is that it is an indication of just how well Departments are fulfilling their savings delivery plans. As I pointed out, I am very pleased that Departments have been concentrating on reducing administrative expenditure and that, in the first six months of the year, administrative expenditure across Departments has gone down by 2·5%, which means that they are focusing savings on that area so that they can deliver on front line services.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he recognise that the £10 million that has been allocated to the schools maintenance programme represents a very small proportion of the essential maintenance that is required?

Mr Wilson: I understand that there is a huge maintenance backlog that is somewhere in the region of £310 million. Nevertheless, we must work with our available resources. We had returned capital expenditure this year, a significant proportion of which has gone to the schools maintenance programme. Given that the Member's party supported decisions by the Westminster Government, I am sure that she knows well that, in times of austerity, we will not have all the money that we want to hand out. Nevertheless, we have sought to allocate it to what we believe to be priorities. It is important to maintain the schools estate. As I pointed out, that expenditure will be very welcome for many small construction firms throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement and, in particular, the extra £10 million for the co-ownership scheme. The Department for Regional Development gave up £18·6 million and has been given back £13·1 million in the reallocation. With regard to road maintenance and upgrades, will the Minister give any reason why only £4 million was reallocated to structural road maintenance?

Mr Wilson: First, a large part of the reason why DRD returned money — we should be pleased at this — is that administrative savings in NI Water were higher than expected for a more efficiently run water service. Therefore, the return of that money for the kind of allocations that were available is to be welcomed. I cannot remember the figure offhand, but I do not look at the money that the DRD returned as a negative because of where a lot of it came from.

As far as allocations are concerned, as I said in my statement, we looked at what the priorities should be and what overcommitment we were prepared to carry into the next monitoring round. On that basis, we made capital allocations. I think that the Member will accept that, since health, education, DRD and DSD had substantial and credible capital bids, we could not allocate

it all to one Department, nor, I think, would he expect us to allocate it all to one Department.

Mr Frew: I note the absence of any reference in the statement to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's bid listed in table D regarding hedging exchange rate transactions. The Minister referred to the quality of the departmental bids. Is he willing to comment on the quality of the Department's bid, given that he and the Executive appear not to have found it compelling enough to grant it?

Mr Wilson: There were twice as many applications and bids as there was money available, so they were not all being met anyway. However, that is not necessarily a comment on the quality of the bid. It was simply to do with what you allocate highest priority to, and it was decided that that was not a high-priority bid. However, I do not think that it says a great deal about the quality of the bid.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. The Minister said that he was not dissatisfied with the performance of NI Water, which led to the surrendering of money from DRD, but will he join me in outlining his disappointment at the poor performance of Invest NI, given its huge budget and the fact that its job is to create jobs? Given that he has been able to redistribute funding to the roads structural maintenance fund, the school maintenance budget and the creation of houses for first-time buyers, his disappointment may be somewhat less than if he had to bring some of the money back to Westminster with him.

Mr Wilson: First, I do not know whether the Member reads the newspapers or listens to the news, but he may have noticed that there is a downturn in the economy. I do not want to make the economics of that too simple, but downturns tend to mean that firms' investment plans sometimes get reduced because there is no confidence that there will be demand in the economy. Secondly, we have to remember that banks are not lending in the way that they were. Therefore, firms may well have applied to Invest NI for funding, but, if they are unable to obtain match funding through the banks, investment projects either get shelved or deferred for some time. Hence, Invest NI returned some money because what was in the pipeline has not come through. However, I think that that is preferable to simply holding on to the money, hoping against hope that schemes will come through.

Of course, should opportunities come forward, there will be more funds to allocate in the February monitoring round. However, I want to point out that, even though the money was not spent by Invest NI, that does not mean that it has not helped the economy. I have stressed that. The money that was returned has now gone into building houses and improving roads and school buildings, and all of that creates jobs in the economy. Therefore, it is not a case of money for job creation having been given back and disappearing. It is simply creating jobs in a different way, and the Member should recognise that we have done that. Indeed, some of the things on which we have spent the money might — initially, anyway — have a greater multiplier effect on the economy than some of the longer-term capital investments made by firms coming here.

Mr Cree: I welcome the Minister's statement. Many of the decisions are excellent. He referred to a meeting with the banks and other financial institutions. As has already been said, we have had smoke and mirrors from the banks for the past two years. During his meeting, was he able to get any clear, transparent targets from the banks to which he can hold them and against which we can monitor their actual performance?

Mr Wilson: There is an immediate target: one for this year and one for the next three years of the Budget. We will be allocating money towards this year. I am trying to add the figures up in my head, but I think that a total of 520 houses will be sold under co-ownership this year as a result of the money already allocated and the new money to be allocated. The target will be for the banks and building societies to provide sufficient finance to allow all the transactions to go through. Next year, the same money will be available, and the target will be for next year's transactions to go through. We have a lottery at the moment. The Minister for Social Development may have to help me out on this, but I think that we are allowing 160 transactions through every quarter or whatever. That means that more than 300 people who want to buy under co-ownership cannot get a co-ownership house. Indeed, many drop out because they feel that the process is pointless. Therefore, we know that the demand is there. How will we monitor it? We have made the money available for the co-ownership element. The question is

whether the banks and the building societies can divvy up money to allow us to facilitate the demand that we know is there for this year and the next number of years. We will be looking at that measurement.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his statement. Has he agreed to allocate additional funding to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to assist it in the procurement of greater supplies of anti-TNF drugs to help it to move more swiftly through the waiting list of sufferers who need courses of those very important drugs?

Mr Wilson: May I say something about the DHSSPS? This time last year, we were in the throes of trying to develop and agree a Budget. Almost every time that I stood on my feet in the Chamber, a war of words broke out. It was said that, by the first week in April, the health service in Northern Ireland would be — to use that American term — "into chapter 11". It would be bankrupt. What relevance an American term had to the financial state of our health service, I do not know. We are now through six months, and the permanent secretary has confirmed that the health service will be able to live within its budget. Moreover, we have made the additional allocations because PEDU has accepted that, if the money is made available to the health service, some of the efficiencies identified can cut down costs in the future.

Of course, the money for cancer drugs is very welcome. It is an indication of the fact that we are living up to the commitments that I made during the Budget process: first, that we would find more money should the health service need it; and, secondly, that we believed that sufficient efficiencies were to be found. It is amazing the difference that a proactive Minister can make compared with one who simply came to the Chamber and moaned but did not do too much managing.

Mr Beggs: The statement indicates that £8·9 million of savings occurred and were passed back to the Executive as a result of Northern Ireland Water's reduced running costs. Will the Minister indicate whether that was as a result of good housekeeping? Will he also advise whether expenditure rules meant that that money came back to the centre rather than being invested in improving pipework that might be prone to freezing?

4.15 pm

Mr Wilson: I would have thought that the Member, who was a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel for I do not know how many years — he was at one stage, I think — would know that, when money is allocated for a certain purpose and is not required for that purpose, it is not simply a case of moving it and saying, "Oh well, we will not spend it on that; we will spend it on something different". The money has to be returned to the centre, because it is not being spent for the purpose for which it was allocated originally. That is an important budgetary control that the Assembly would not want to give way on. Secondly, those are savings in the running costs of the water service. I would have thought that savings on running costs — of your house, your car, your business or Northern Ireland Water — are always a result of better management. Therefore, this is a result of better management.

On the question of why the allocation did not go back to the water service for new pipelines, I can only give money back and allocate it if people make a bid. A bid was not made, so Northern Ireland Water had obviously decided that its investment plans for this year and its capacity to deliver on those investment plans had already been met.

Mrs Cochrane: Thank you for your statement, Minister. You referred to the need to make progress on allocating the remaining funding in the childcare strategy. Will that include programmes such as Home-Start, which is crying out for funding to secure its services?

Mr Wilson: Home-Start does not come under OFMDFM. If I am correct, it comes under the Department of Health. It would be relevant to ask the Minister in charge for the figures and details of where and how that money will be spent.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I understood that an hour was allocated. It was also my understanding that I had put my name down.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, Mr Allister, your name does not appear to be on the list.

Mr Allister: It was certainly phoned through. Since there is time, can I ask a question? Will

you give me permission to ask a question, Mr Deputy Speaker, since we are within the time?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Yes, Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: I am very much obliged. I want to focus on the issue of unfunded pressures in the Budget. When the Budget was drawn up, inflation was 2% or 2·5%. It is now 5%. Is that unfunded pressure likely to gobble up a good bit of monitoring round reallocations in the future, if not in this monitoring round? Secondly, if I am permitted, I note that, in the health budget, the Minister has allocated £15 million of the resource money effectively to fund redundancies. How many redundancies do you anticipate in the health service?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for the question. I am glad that he got the opportunity to ask the question, because, as usual, it gives me an opportunity to make a couple of points.

The exact detail of how many redundancies there will be will be up to the Minister of Health. However, it has been pointed out — indeed, his bid made it quite clear — that it will be in areas of non-essential services. I am not sure of the exact scope. One of the reasons why the allocation has been made is that it should enable him to make savings year-on-year for the rest of the Budget period. We can welcome that, because it helps the Minister to address the very issue that the Member has raised, namely additional inflationary pressures.

The Member may well notice that some bids were made for inflationary pressures. For example, the Department of Education made a £3·7 million bid for utility costs. Those inflationary pressures, just as they will create issues for individual households or businesses, will create problems for public services. We have assumed that the GDP deflator will be the inflationary pressure over the next four years. That is an assumption that all Departments make. If it is greater than that, of course there will be pressures. However, I am pleased to see that, even with those pressures occurring, Departments have been able to identify huge administrative savings which amount to 2·5% of administrative spending so far. Of course, that in turn helps to reduce the pressures that inflation may cause.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That definitely concludes questions to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Private Members' Business

Car Tax Renewal

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. The Minister will have 15 minutes to respond to the motion. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Hamilton: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes with concern that people in Northern Ireland are unable to avail themselves of all the car tax renewal methods that are available to people in Great Britain; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward proposals to address this problem.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank you and the Business Committee for allocating the time to this debate. I thank the Minister of the Environment for his attendance to hear the views and issues raised by Members from around the House.

Like legions of others, I renew my car tax by going to the local post office a few days before it is due to run out — or rather, in case she is listening, I tend to get my wife to do it for me. That is probably what a significant number of people in Northern Ireland have done and continue to do. The issue was raised with me a while back by a friend who had renewed their car tax by using the phone number for the office in Coleraine. They then raised a particular issue about that experience with me, which elicited my investigations and interest in the subject.

Before I go any further, I appreciate that, following an October monitoring round statement in which it was announced that £70 million of additional funding had been allocated to public services in Northern Ireland, this is probably not the hottest of topics, although it is in the main event seat in the House this evening. It is something that we all have some experience of. It is one of those little quality-of-life issues that we come across in our job when people tell us of their experiences and their interaction with public services and how they think things could be improved and made easier for them. There is a duty on all of us as public representatives not only to fund our services as well as we can but to make their interface with the general public as easy and customer friendly as possible.

The system for car tax renewal is threefold. There are the Driver and Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland's (DVANI) eight offices across Northern Ireland, which seem to be reasonably well spread geographically. I am sure that there are some people in some pockets of the Province who would dispute that, but, as is typical of such things in Northern Ireland, we have eight, which, for a population of 1·7 million, is probably proportionately much more than you would have in Scotland, Wales or elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The opening hours of those offices means that people cannot always get access. The office in Belfast is notorious for accessibility: you have to park at the other end of the estate and walk in, and you cannot park outside it. I think that other branches of government have had issues with issuing tickets to those parked illegally around that office. Therefore, there are convenience issues, never mind the opening times of some of those facilities.

There are post offices where you can get your car tax renewed, but, as we all know, there are parts of the Province, particularly rural parts of Northern Ireland, where people will testify that you cannot renew your car tax in every post office. Indeed, there are only two post offices in County Down where you apply for car tax renewal using the V10 form along with the change of keeper form. It is not just that not every post office offers those services; it is that not every type of car tax renewal can be applied for in every post office. Given the rurality of Northern Ireland, it tends to be rural post offices that do not offer those services, and that causes its own problems.

As I said, there is a phone system for car tax renewal in Northern Ireland, but, as I understand it, there is only a handful of lines, which can handle only a maximum of 500 calls a day, and the number is not permitted to be advertised because of an agreement with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), which governs those arrangements. I am sure that all Members will agree that we want to see all those services maintained and enhanced, and we want more services.

That takes me to the crux of my case. The general direction of travel of the delivery of public services tends to be towards the enthusiastic embracing of technological advances, particularly in IT. We can see that happening internally in the public sector in Northern Ireland. We have had some successful IT advances, such as those in Account NI and HR Connect. Those have saved us money but have also improved service delivery. I noticed recently that the head of Enterprise Shared Services in Northern Ireland spoke at a conference in the Irish Republic to try to teach them some of the lessons that we have learned here. In that respect, we are at the forefront as pioneers.

We also have the three-digit telephone number which has been run out for some services and, hopefully, will be expanded in the future. We are embracing the use of telephony, which is also being used for benefits. For example, the employment and support allowance is processed primarily over the telephone with clients. The NI Direct website has come on in leaps and bounds; it is an excellent website, through which customers can be directed to where they apply online for benefits and rate relief. In the Minister's sphere, customers can book an MOT appointment online with Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland (DVLNI) as well as their theory test and driving test. However, you cannot renew your car tax online. Councils in Northern Ireland also offer various services online. For example, you can license your dog online. However, it is absurd that, although you can license your dog, you cannot tax your car.

Mr Weir: Unless it is a Rover.

Mr Hamilton: Very good, Mr Weir. I wondered why Mr Weir had come in. It is obvious that he has been waiting for some time to make that contribution.

In Great Britain, customers can renew their car tax online, which is a successful and popular service. Why is this anomaly in place in Northern Ireland? It stems from the fact that it is an excepted matter. DVLA in Swansea, under the Department for Transport, is responsible for those arrangements in Great Britain. We have an arrangement with DVLNI — based in Coleraine in your constituency, Mr Deputy Speaker — and with its satellite offices to deliver those services across Northern Ireland, so there are separate arrangements, which have included the separate development of IT down through the years.

There has been significant investment in the DVLA IT system, which has allowed the renewal of car tax to be done online so long as the person doing it has their car registration number, insurance details and a payment method. Obviously, that makes it exceptionally convenient for people

who maybe cannot make it to a certain post office on time or who do not have a post office or DVLA office in their area. It really is user-friendly and improves quality of life, which, for some people, may be chaotic, with their employment or personal situation. There is also an automated phone system in Great Britain through which people can renew their car tax. As technology advances and we make more of our services in Northern Ireland accessible to people online or by telephone, that anomaly will look more and more ridiculous.

The motion is in no way a criticism of the current Minister or his predecessors, not least because they are three party colleagues of mine. In fact, one of them is my boss in the Department of Finance and Personnel. I know that he raised this issue during his tenure, that he had meetings with his counterparts at UK Government level and that he received commitments to work towards the stated goal.

4.30 pm

I understand that work is ongoing, and it was highlighted by a response to a recent question for written answer from me to the Minister of the Environment. I am aware that some IT hardware has been moved from Northern Ireland to Swansea to facilitate all of that happening. It appears that we are moving very slowly towards the necessary migration of information from a system here to a system nationally. I want to see that happening in a way that maintains the service here; there cannot be any dilution of that service. Although moving to online transactions is very popular and convenient — I think that 40% of transactions in Great Britain happen online — we cannot have just online service provision. We cannot have provision just through telephony either; we have to have a full, broad range of services. We need to maintain the offices and post offices that provide those services. In fact, we need to expand the post offices that provide it. We also need to expand the telephone service and introduce online availability, not least because it is a much less costly system. I understand that around 20 pence is the administration cost to renew car tax online versus pounds for doing it via the telephone, never mind what it would be to do it face to face in an office.

In conclusion, I go back to the point that I made at the beginning: the Assembly should be about making people's lives better. Sometimes, that is about making their lives easier. The proposal, on the face of it, is very simple, albeit that it is mired by some technological and financial difficulties. However, it is a small change that could have a very positive and meaningful impact on people's lives by addressing advances in technology and utilising those to help to make people's lives a wee bit easier.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, and I thank the Member for bringing it to the Floor. I agree that it is a simple proposal. There will be broad agreement around the Chamber, so I will try not to repeat too much of what the Member said, or what others will, no doubt, say later.

There is growing and changing public expectation of what they should be able to do and what they can do. When Departments provide services, the public expect to be able to access them online and to pay for them through debit cards, credit cards, PayPal and other methods that are coming online all the time. If small businesses that employ two or three people can set up a website to deal with credit card and debit card requests, surely Departments should be able to do the same.

Over the past few years, I have paid my car tax by phone. I found it very handy, but the system is clearly not capable of dealing with the volume of phone calls that it receives. The public are not aware of the facility. The Member who proposed the motion submitted a question for written answer earlier this year, and it was revealed that only 254 of 731 calls were answered on 18 May. Many people who want to use that service are unable to do so. The statistics also show that over half of the vehicle licensing revenue comes via the Post Office.

Members referred to across the water, where things are moving on. On the rest of the island, people pay by Visa and debit cards online. It is a very simple, step-by-step process. We should not limit ourselves just to websites. Perhaps the Department could look at developing an iPhone app, through which you could book your MOT or your driving test and pay for your car tax. I would find that very useful, so perhaps the Minister could take that on board.

I fully support the motion. Hopefully —

Mr McMullan: Does the Member agree that the motion provides the opportunity to look at using rural post offices as another method of paying

for car tax? That would greatly enhance rural post offices and would also make life in isolated rural areas much easier for those people who currently have to travel miles to tax their car.

Mr McKay: The Member makes a valid point. We should not forget that a significant part of our community does not use online services and does not have the technological know-how to deal with such things, so that service should remain. Rather than leaving post offices with the services that they have, we should always be looking at how we can add to those services to make post offices an even richer resource than they already are in rural areas. I support the motion, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the chance to speak on the matter. Although it may seem minor, it irritates people when it is not resolved. As we know, vehicle licensing in Northern Ireland is one of a few powers that got caught up in the blur of devolution. Last night, when I was looking up car tax on Wikipedia, I was intrigued to see that car tax came out in the 1890s and again in another form in 1903. It has long been there, and in all that time, we should have learned about how to do it.

Although, in theory, it is an excepted matter, under the guidance of the Secretary of State for Transport in London, the service is provided by the DVANI. Given the semi-autonomous nature of vehicle licensing here, it is unsurprising that separate IT systems appeared, and, unfortunately, that has led to the disparities that we have heard about already. That we are discussing the matter today, despite the fact that it has long been an issue, demonstrates, as I said, how important it is that we try to resolve it as quickly as possible.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes strongly that there is a simple and straightforward resolution to this: full integration of the IT system in Northern Ireland with the one across the water. Surely, given all the technology that is available today, it should not be that difficult. I welcome the fact that, over recent years, some notional work has been done towards that, but with DVLA's decision to suspend the integration project in 2009, it appears that the momentum behind it has stalled, and I hope that this debate will give it the push that is needed. I am sure that the Department is awaiting the findings of the feasibility report that is under way.

Surely, the need for a fully integrated system is obvious. I would appreciate it if the Minister could detail what he feels are the main stumbling blocks to the total integration of the two systems. Not only are Northern Ireland drivers being severely disadvantaged by not being able to renew their tax discs online but the Minister admits himself that there is only a token provision of telephone services. In the 21st century, why on earth can DVLA not trust enough people to renew their tax over the phone? Can we have more people to answer the phones, or, as has been suggested already, an automated answering machine? Indeed, the telephone number itself is almost a state secret, with almost no public advertising of it. To digress slightly, most government documents contain no contact numbers. The practice should be that every document should have on it some details of how to communicate with the Department. Many people who renew their tax over the phone are able to do so only by keeping the number safe from the previous year.

Another aspect of car tax renewal that causes many people here undue stress and anxiety is the need to prove that they have valid MOT and insurance documents. That can usually only be done by having them to hand. Although the rationale behind the need to be in possession of those documents is easily understood, the way in which it is incorporated into the renewal of tax discs makes what could be a straightforward procedure convoluted and drawn out. Why, when, across the water, the DVLA has direct access to insurance companies' databases, are customers in Northern Ireland still forced to carry paper copies of their documents? That is another example of DVLA providing one level of service in Great Britain and another in Northern Ireland.

We often push for everything to be done through IT and the web and, sometimes, we forget that, in Northern Ireland, some people are not very good with IT and modern things. We need to have every different format available, including the telephone and the mail. We must not cut one off but use all the systems that are available. I chuckle as I hear of an iPhone app. I have no idea how to use an iPhone app, but perhaps I could be taught. I like the idea of my dog trying to get its licence online, and it might be better placed than I am to do so.

Let us lead and get this situation changed as quickly as we can. The problem is obvious, the solution is obvious, and I ask the Minister to

give a guarantee that he will find a resolution as soon as possible.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who tabled the motion, which has brought into sharp focus what we need to do to contemporise our licensing system. In Britain, motor tax can be renewed online or by telephone via an automated system. About 60% of tax discs are renewed in that way. Here, however, we have a limited telephone system.

I will give you an example. It took quite a while to get through when I rang in. When I did get through, however, the girl was brilliant. She was very efficient and good at her job. She seemed to have access to other stuff, including insurance details and the likes of that, Mr Kinahan. Perhaps the Minister can clarify that. Either that or I got through the loop one way or another.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I assume that the Member received assurances from the Minister that he did not leave instructions that if Patsy McGlone were to phone up, the phone should be hung up at that point. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McGlone: Nice one, Peter, but I do not think that I mentioned leadership to her.

The only card that I had in my pocket was my Visa credit card, but the system does not allow for that method of payment, which I found very strange and probably antiquated when you look at it in the round. I had to ring in the next day and use my debit card.

The Post Office can work OK for us, but, apparently, it cannot deal with the whole range of taxation. Of course, it can provide car tax only if the customer provides the reminder form. The Post Office always tells us how many services it provides, but I am sure that if it is going to provide a service to attract more people over its threshold, it will do that at a cost. I am sure that there are costs associated with the DVLA if the Post Office is to take on additional responsibilities in that area. That may be a factor, because I am aware that there was an online services project in 2004.

Members are right: whether it is on Daithí's iPhone, somebody's internet or even just an integrated phone system, in this day and age, we expect proper services. It is taken as read that such services should be provided. I am sure that the Minister will provide more detail on the integrated system that was to be provided. Initiatives were taken in 2004, but the project was suspended in 2009.

I am not presuming what the Minister will tell us about funding issues for integration of the likes of the Post Office or DVLA systems, but if funding is not fully provided by DVLA, perhaps the Minister will provide us with details about how the system could be integrated. I understand what Mr Kinahan was talking about, namely, that the entire system be integrated with the DVLA system. However, I have a concern that that could potentially jeopardise jobs here, where many people are ready, available and more than up to and experienced in the task of providing those services. They also know the areas that they are talking about, which sometimes can be an issue.

So, yes, this debate is useful and, yes, it is right that we as Members, who represent constituencies, should have up-to-date, proper and adequate services in 2011. I fully support the motion and look forward to the Minister's response to those issues.

4.45 pm

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I am sorry for coming into the Chamber a bit late for the start of the debate. I was caught up by a phone call on a constituency matter.

I thank the Members who secured a debate on this issue, which is that Northern Ireland customers receive a raw deal when it comes to renewing their car tax. Some months ago, the Environment Committee was contacted by Oliver McMullan MLA about car tax renewal facilities in Carnlough's post office. He informed the Committee that, as is the case with a lot of post offices in Northern Ireland, that one is based in a rural constituency and is a main link to accessing services. Unfortunately, however, car tax renewal was not a service offered at that post office. The Committee decided to forward a copy of the letter to the Department for comment, but members were disappointed by the response, which stated that it was a matter for Post Office Counters Ltd.

Members agreed to write to the Department again to outline concerns that Northern Ireland customers did not enjoy the same facilities for car tax renewal as others in the UK, particularly in relation to telephone and online options. The Department's last reply to the Committee

in September stated that the Minister had raised and will continue to raise the issue with ministerial counterparts in the Department for Transport. Although we recognise the difficulties that the Minister faces on the issue, which remains an excepted matter, members only wanted Northern Ireland customers to have parity with those in GB.

We live in a digital world, where emerging technology ensures that we can do many things online, from booking a flight to buying a TV licence. As we all know, we can book our MOT via the DVA website, so why can we not renew our car tax online? We are told that there is an issue with linking databases between Northern Ireland and the main DVLA headquarters in Swansea, but surely that can be overcome easily enough with today's technology. We have also been told that the telephone renewal pilot scheme in Northern Ireland is totally inadequate to meet demand. It is quite evident, therefore, that the demand to renew via telephone exists, but the DVLA said that it will fund neither the capital investment nor the ongoing running costs required to make that service more widely available. That just beggars belief. If there were no demand, I could see why no further money should be spent. However, the pilot project that has run over the past eight or nine years and still runs today is clearly an option that is wanted by customers in Northern Ireland but is being denied to them.

At this point, I should acknowledge the work done by the staff in the DVA headquarters in Coleraine. When the previous Committee visited the office in June 2010, members were impressed by how efficiently the staff renewed car tax. An expanded telephone service should help to ensure that we can safeguard those jobs, which we all are keen to do in the current economic climate. At the Environment Committee on 13 October, members agreed to write directly to the Secretary of State for Transport, after this debate, to request that Northern Ireland customers be given parity with the rest of GB. We live in a busy world, and we should have the options of picking up the telephone, renewing online or popping to our nearest post office at a time convenient to us. We should not be the poor relations.

Going back to the issue that kick-started the Committee's interest in the subject, I also need to highlight the need for more post offices to offer car tax renewal. The majority of Northern Ireland's population lives in rural areas where post office services are crucial to local communities.

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

Ms Lo: We are all aware of the problem of broadband access and poor download speeds in rural areas.

Lord Morrow: I, too, commend my colleagues for tabling the motion. It is timely and appropriate that we discuss such an issue. As I listened to and thought about the debate, I was struck by the number of things that we must always wait for: driving licences, gun permits, passports or MOT tests. There seems to be an endless queue.

The motion in no way implies or insinuates that we should close the DVLA office in Coleraine or withdraw its services. In fact, the opposite is true. The intention of the motion is that the Coleraine office should be enhanced and further services should be provided there.

It is interesting to note that in all regions of the United Kingdom, social security benefits and pensions are parity issues. I suspect that car tax is a parity issue also. Therefore this region of the United Kingdom should be no different from our counterparts across the water. We want to see the enhancement of the facility at Coleraine. We do not want to see any of the services that it provides being taken away.

There comes a time when we have to start thinking outside the box in how we do things and how we provide services. I suspect that we are all old enough — well, most of us —

Mr Hussey: No, we are not.

Lord Morrow: I was looking at you, Mr Hussey, before I changed my mind. *[Laughter.]*

We are old enough to recall a time when if you wanted to get a few pounds, you had to go to a bank. You do not have to do that anymore. You can go to any town or village cash point and extract cash. I know that, in the past, some extracted cash in a different way: they took the cash point with them. That is not what I am advocating or even hinting at. I suggest that you leave the cash point where you found it: take your cash, not the cash point. I am not advocating theft.

I am pleased that the motion has had universal support so far, as most people can see the merits in what we are trying to achieve. I have no doubt that the Minister, being a listening Minister who always wants to articulate Members' views and concerns, will want to take forward what is being said here today. When he sees the resounding support for the motion, he will go away determined.

I do not know whether his term in office will be long or short; I say that considerately. However, I am sure that he will want to put down a marker before he terminates his position — should he do so. I say directly to the Minister: here is one area where you can leave a mark on the Department should the day come that you might leave, in the future or in the not-too-distant future, whichever the case may be.

I commend the motion to the House. I trust that the Minister will respond positively and assure the House that he has noted the motion and will take decisive action. I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the House is relieved that the Member has clarified his position on cash points.

Ms P Bradley: I thank my colleagues Mr Hamilton and Mr Weir for tabling the motion. We have heard how online purchase or a wider availability of the service in post offices would be an invaluable resource to our rural communities, but the area that I represent also needs an updated service.

I went online at the weekend to find a list of post offices within two miles of me where I could renew my car tax. To my surprise, I found four, all of which were accessible to me by car, public transport or even by walking and all of which could renew my car tax with the form that I had. I commend Simon for renewing his car tax two weeks before it is due. Well done; I wish that I was a bit more like you. I have always to get someone else to get my car tax. I generally phone my mother in a blind panic asking her to go to the post office for me.

Lord Morrow: Two weeks after it is due.

Ms P Bradley: We will not go into that, Lord Morrow.

Like many other working parents, it is not unusual for me to be sitting at midnight, ordering my weekly shopping. I book all my holidays online, I organise all the trips that I intend taking while I am on holiday online, I book my car hire online, I select what I would like to eat during the flight online, and I even download the books that I want to read and the music that I want to listen to on holiday online. Christmas is fast approaching, and 90% of the gifts that I will be giving will be purchased online. I estimate that the majority of my spending every month is via the internet. I have already spoken of the services available, and I have utilised the service of booking my children's theory tests online.

I do not shop online because it is cheaper, because quite often I am charged for using my debit or credit card. I do not shop online because of greater choice, because quite often I receive a little note that says that my purchase is incomplete. I utilise those services not only because it is convenient but, more importantly, because of the availability of my time. As I said earlier, I am like many other working parents, and I know that the Minister will relate to that. Thankfully, I do not have to do the school run any more but we leave the house early in the morning before post offices are open and we get back late at night when they are closed. Many times, we have no other choice than to use online services. Therefore, I look forward to the Minister's response. I fully support the motion.

Mr Hussey: I welcome the chance to speak on this issue. I fully agree with the comments of many of the Members who spoke before me. The noble Lord Morrow referred to age and ageism. Of course, he will remember the time when it was a national pastime not to tax your car. However, it is good to see that times have moved on, and the Guinness label is no longer required as evidence of tax. He will remember that better than I would, being a lot older than me.

I do not intend to repeat everything that has been said so far. We all know the issues: no online services and a poor telephone service, as well as not being able to pay with credit cards. Although I fully support the roll-out of the online service, as well as a full integration of IT systems, I feel strongly that we should also be looking at the services that are currently provided across the Province. I will come back to that in a moment.

IT services are certainly a positive way forward, if you can access broadband. In certain parts of west Tyrone, you cannot even access a telephone line. People may think that I have

gone off on a tangent. However, it is a fact that you cannot get broadband or even a telephone line in certain parts of west Tyrone. The secret telephone number that everybody seems to know, but that I do not know, is of no use to us in west Tyrone. I also find it interesting that only certain people seem to know the phone number. It must be written on the back of somebody's hand and passed along at secret meetings.

Lord Morrow: It is the grapevine.

Mr Hussey: Thank you for that, Lord Morrow. Perhaps, some day, I will find the aforementioned grapevine, and I will find the phone number.

I want to spend a few moments discussing one aspect of renewing car tax in Northern Ireland, which has been mentioned already. Some 50% of all vehicle excise duty collected in Northern Ireland goes through local post offices. In the 2009-2010 financial year, that accounted for approximately £83 million of the £164 million collected here. According to DVANI, 19 post offices in Country Tyrone provide the service to tax your car. However, some of those services are more advanced than others. The majority of those 19 post offices are based in the constituency that I represent, and I know from personal and practical experience that many people use that service because it is reliable and tailored towards the user.

As a rural constituency, we have seen the loss of an awful lot of post offices. Reference has been made to that. That has a massive knock-on effect in a rural constituency. Do you decide to drive to the county town of Omagh to tax your car or what do you do? The online service is wonderful if it works. An iPhone is wonderful if it works, you understand it and you can get a connection to get it to work. In certain parts of Tyrone, you have to stand on the roof of your car, point your telephone towards heaven and hope that you get a signal.

Mr Weir: It would have to have a pretty sturdy roof.

Mr Hussey: Let me assure you that I have never stood on the roof of a car, nor do I have any intention of so doing.

Many people, specifically in County Tyrone, rely on post offices. That is a good service, and it should be made available in more areas.

5.00 pm

We have mentioned the fact that DVLNI has access to people's insurance records. That is positive. We have all seen the advertisement on the television, in which there is a warning that the authorities are aware of whether the cars of people in England, Scotland and Wales are insured. I know that I am going slightly off track, but that is something that we should use here. If your vehicle is not insured and is on the road, let us see it being removed. People who do not have motor insurance are a very dangerous aspect of driving in Northern Ireland.

I fully support the motion. On the day that I have to stand on the roof of the car, I will call on the honourable Lord to give me a hand to get onto it.

Mr D McIlveen: I congratulate the Members on bringing the motion to the House. However, I have one disagreement with my friend and colleague Mr Hamilton: he is too humble when he says that this is not an important issue.

Mr Hamilton: That is not a common accusation.

Mr D McIlveen: I thought that he would take heart from that. In all seriousness, there are one million vehicles registered in Northern Ireland, so I do not think that there are too many people in this country who are not affected by the inconvenience of the system that we have in place. In England and Wales, drivers have been able to pay their car tax by credit card, online, by phone or by post for several years. That system, by means of a relatively simple improvement in the workings of the IT system, makes people's lives much easier. I am confused as to why that option seems to be beyond the realms of reason in this part of the United Kingdom. It needs to be addressed urgently. I am fully aware that, ultimately, it is a reserved matter, but I find it difficult to believe that there is nothing we can do to establish the situation. I hope that we will hear good news from the Minister in that regard in the near future.

In reality, the DVA has two conflicting statements. The first is that the best way to provide car tax renewal by credit card is to integrate the IT system with that in the rest of the United Kingdom. As a result, the decision was taken not to fund a credit card payment system within the DVA. However, the integration project was suspended in 2009. We therefore have two paradoxical statements by the DVA. The Minister needs to look at that to see how it can be addressed.

It is also important to note that the law states that licence renewal reminders cannot be ignored. Of course, we fully accept and support that. However, if the law that stands in the rest of the United Kingdom is going to apply in Northern Ireland, surely we should be afforded the same convenience of payment as people in the rest of the United Kingdom. Surely it is logical that the system becomes integrated into the rest of the United Kingdom's system.

Further advantages to an integrated IT system are above and beyond the taxation issue. Recently, I was contacted by a constituent with regard to a similar issue. His complaint was that, in order to protect his cherished registration, he was forced to temporarily transfer the registration from one vehicle to another, at a cost of £80. In the rest of the United Kingdom, however, there is a process in place whereby the registration can be retained and assigned to a different vehicle in the future. That was to be extended in Northern Ireland, again by way of integrating the IT systems. However, it is simply another example of disadvantage that people in Northern Ireland have faced. A number of months ago, I wrote to the Minister on that issue. He agreed that there was no sound reason why the facility should not be available to motorists in Northern Ireland, and I look forward to an update on that this afternoon.

This is just a simple, user-friendly way of making the system better. As a number of my colleagues have said, that is what we are here to do: we are here to make the lives of the people whom we represent a little better. The motion is about the harmonising of the user-friendly system that exists in the rest of the United Kingdom. I urge the Minister to do what he can to bring the same measures forward in Northern Ireland.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate. Taken in totality, their contributions capture the range of issues in the matter.

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

I want to confirm to Mr Weir, given his intervention, that I have instructed the DVA that, in the event of it receiving a phone call from a Mr McGlone, a Mr McDevitt or a Dr McDonnell, it is to accommodate them in every way possible. I will also issue the same instructions for my colleagues in West Belfast in the event that I run in future elections there and there is an opportunity for transfers. Paul Maskey has gone *[Laughter.]* Mr Maskey the MP was here earlier. However, do not tempt me to do the same for you, Mr Weir.

I want to deal with some of the big points that were raised. Anna Lo and other Members referred to the fact that this is an issue of parity. If you interrogate the issue of parity, you will see that, for London, parity is too often a one-way street. We must live by the discipline of parity, but there are occasions on which we do not get the benefits of parity. That is an issue that the Assembly must get its head around over the next three or four years. In the very near future, we will be asked to live by the principle of parity when it comes to welfare reform, yet we do not have the benefit of parity when it comes to vehicle licensing services. London cannot have it both ways: either we have the benefits of parity in full or we do not. If we do not have the full benefits of parity then we, as a Government and an Assembly, need to interrogate that as an issue of principle. That is a broad political point.

I also reassure Lord Morrow that, whatever residue of time I have in this particular office, I will continue to put down real markers — to borrow his term — on this matter and on any other matter that I have identified in my short time as Minister of the Environment.

Back on 20 June, at which time I had been in the Executive for six weeks, I had a meeting in London with Mike Penning the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport and I flagged up this issue. I was aware of all its dimensions, not just the denial of services to customers in the North of Ireland. Simon Hamilton was right to say that this is a quality-of-life issue, as was Paula —

Mr Weir: Bradley.

Mr Attwood: I was about to say Paula Bradshaw, but I would have got into trouble on a whole lot of levels. A fine representative she is too.

I flagged up that, beyond the fact that this was a quality-of-life issue as regards experience of government in the North of Ireland, there were many other reasons why we needed to have those services expanded to the North. I put down very firm markers that we wanted the fullest range of services provided to people in the North on vehicle licensing; that we wanted

jobs to be protected in Coleraine and in the post office network; and that we wanted an expansion of opportunities in Coleraine and elsewhere to deliver functions to the people in the North and in Britain, as we do with welfare management and benefits. I drew a line in the sand during my meeting with Mike Penning. I told him that, if there was any ambition by the London Government to centralise those services more and more in Swansea, with consequences that would arise more and more for all the devolved regions and not just for Northern Ireland, they would be called to account.

So it is not that I will put down markers in whatever period of time I have left; the markers have been put down very firmly by my going to see Mike Penning within six weeks of taking office. There is a trail of correspondence — I wrote letters on 27 July and 16 August, and a reply from Mike Penning is dated 4 October — which makes every argument raised in the House this afternoon and puts them firmly on the table before Mike Penning in London. I want to give that very strong reassurance.

We need to look at this honestly and realistically. There was a proposal for full integration which, as Members have indicated, was suspended in 2009. Between 2004 and 2009, when that proposal was live, the ambition was to have full integration. In the last couple of months, the London Government have reinitiated that process of potential integration. We need to be mindful that, as that process continues, London will have ambitions which, inter alia, will be to cut costs. Let us not mislead ourselves or people in the North: if the London Government go fully in the direction of integration, one of their ambitions, over and above the provision of services to the people of Britain and Northern Ireland, will no doubt be to rationalise services to reduce costs. In the previous integration project, which the London Government suspended in 2009, it was anticipated that over 100 jobs would be lost in Coleraine. That was the message from London. Given the economic circumstances and the uncertainties in the global economic market, given whatever might happen between now and Wednesday with the euro and given my view of the potential, as I indicated this morning, for a future emergency Budget from London, we need to be very clear-headed about that. In the reinitiation of the integration project that Mike Smith and his colleagues have now commenced, there is risk. That is why I went to see Mike Penning and created a paper trail: to make it crystal clear to him that, if the ambition is to provide integration and at the same time reduce employment, he will have a battle on his hands, not just in respect of Northern Ireland but in respect of the devolved arrangements.

I am going to London tomorrow for a meeting of the devolved Administrations with the Environment Minister in relation to a number of matters. In the margins of that meeting, I will take the opportunity to speak to my ministerial colleagues in Edinburgh and Cardiff, so that they can report to their relevant ministerial colleagues in the devolved Administrations that the issue of integration, which creates opportunities that I want to embrace and see rolled out to facilitate the provision of services in the North, also creates risk.

That is why I appreciate this debate. It creates an opportunity to interrogate the various proposals and, at the same time, to put down markers — to borrow Lord Morrow's phrase — as to what I, a future Minister or this Government might do to ensure that, whatever London's ambitions may be, they do not impact adversely on the quality of service and the number of jobs in the North.

I reassure Members that, in my conversations with London and in writing, I have raised the issue of extending the opportunities for vehicle licensing through the post office network. I accept the point made by the Member for East Antrim in respect of rural provision. That is self-evident. It is a matter that I raised with Mike Penning and will continue to raise with Post Office Counters Limited, which has responsibility for the provision of services. Members know from their constituency experience how it and others manage the services, number, location and future of post offices. We know that it too is trying to drill down and impose restraints by closing post offices. However, as an interim measure, I asked for a review of the provision of vehicle licensing at post offices in NI, with a view to increasing the number of post offices at which tax discs can be renewed, and I continue to make that case.

5.15 pm

Given that the systems integration project has been reinitiated, I have instructed officials to provide a proposal that I can take to Mike Penning, so that, whatever the nature of what eventually emerges — it may be two or three years before it is fully implemented — we can

provide London with a proposal that scopes out how the North of Ireland — Coleraine and elsewhere —can provide a higher level of service to Britain. As I said earlier, that includes the potential for cherished number plates to become a dedicated function of DVA in the North.

There is also the potential for DVA in the North to provide direct tax renewal information to the population of Britain and not just to Northern Ireland. Those and other examples need to be part of the conversation that this Government and my Department have with London so that the financial constraints that those in London may see and the ambition of the London Government to centralise services in Swansea are mitigated here in the North and in the other devolved regions by providing Administrations there with opportunities for new jobs. That is why I say to Danny Kinahan that the mere ambition of full integration is only part of the political narrative. The wider narrative has to be that full integration carries risks as well as potential opportunities. Given the more than 300 jobs in Coleraine and the number of other jobs involved in providing such services in our post office network, we need to realise that full integration is not necessarily the best way of protecting jobs in the North of Ireland. It may be the best opportunity to provide the best service to people in the North, but it may not be and in my view is not necessarily the best means by which to protect those employed in such work.

Daithí McKay's suggestion of having an iPhone app was forward-thinking; I will raise it with the relevant authorities as a detail. However, Mr McKay also has to acknowledge that it is surely not beyond a Department to do what needs to be done to make provision in the North. At this time, we do not have the legal power to provide the full range of services to customers in Northern Ireland because it is a reserved matter. Even were we inclined to go there, the IT, logistical, management and accommodation needs that would arise would be so extensive that they would further cripple the DOE budget, never mind that of government. It is not simply a matter of saying, "This is how we wish it to be and government should provide it". At present, a constitutional issue arises in heading in that direction, and there are also logistical, managerial and financial consequences.

That having been said, I welcome the sentiment and the content of the debate. It highlights the fact that we in the North do not have the services of those elsewhere in Britain; that full integration is highly desirable; and that we need to protect the jobs in our post office network, in Coleraine and elsewhere, in the event that integration sees further centralisation in Swansea. There are things that we can do, but we need to warn ourselves and London that if the Government there carry through the full implementation of their plans —

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

Mr Attwood: — there could be a serious risk to jobs in the North.

Mr Weir: The debate has been very constructive and good-humoured. A range of points were made, none of which was incompatible with any of the other points. It has fallen to me to sum up, so I first want to thank all the Members who contributed and welcome the universal support for the motion in the House.

As Anna Lo said, the issue is about people in Northern Ireland getting a bit of a raw deal. It is about parity. I take on board what the Minister said about the fact that parity is a two-way street and that it is not simply about our taking all the impositions and getting none of the benefits. Indeed, on the issue of parity, there is something fundamentally wrong with the fact that people here are unable to renew their car tax online or, indeed, by credit card. That puts us out of kilter with not only the rest of United Kingdom but — in deference to some of my nationalist colleagues across the way — the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland is the only part of these islands where people do not have that opportunity.

Simon Hamilton indicated in his opening remarks that it was about dealing with the problems of the current system, a lot of which are to do with convenience. David McIlveen highlighted the extent of the problem, when he said that about one million people in Northern Ireland are registered car owners. The high level of inconvenience for people needs to be borne in mind.

It is the case, as Simon Hamilton also indicated, that the issue is part of a wider process. We are moving to a position where we have much greater online opportunities. Daithí McKay pointed out that there is a growing public expectation of what can be achieved through the services provided by government. So, we have got to meet that expectation.

On the issue of online usage, Paula Bradley indicated that there are those who seem to do almost everything in their life online. I just wondered whether she actually bothered to go on the holiday at the end of it. A lot of people clearly place much more emphasis on using the internet and credit cards. When it comes to booking things online, I tend to fall into the same category as Mr Kinahan. I am closer to his position than that of his very talented dog, which seems to be able to make phone calls. Although I think that online usage is a very worthwhile area to explore, I have to say that Mr McKay's iPhone app was entirely beyond me. I class myself as a bit of a Luddite in respect of computers and finance. I do not even own a credit card, which may make me unique in the Assembly. The reality is that it is about providing a wide choice.

As a number of Members said, although we want to expand the services available by providing online and credit card facilities, we do not want to close down other avenues. It is important that we recognise that. A number of Members touched on the issue of post offices. I know that Daithí McKay, Paula Bradley and Mr Hussey raised that issue. We have got to realise that the post office network's services need to be expanded. Indeed, Mr Hamilton highlighted the fact that even the post offices that offer that service sometimes do not offer the full service. This could be a win-win situation for post offices. In recent years, there has been grave concern about the pressure that post offices are under because of increased competition. If we can push at what is, in many ways, an open door by trying to expand the services that are available, particularly in rural areas, we should do so. It is an important issue that is part of that wider context.

Mention was made of phone calls. I appreciate that there are resource implications involved in answering phone calls. However, it is not particularly satisfactory that — Simon Hamilton was given this detail in an answer to a written question — of the 731 phone calls made on one particular day only 254 were answered. That does not instil in people any level of confidence in government. That area needs to be examined.

Patsy McGlone contrasted the situation here with that in Great Britain, where the system does not allow payment by particular credit and Visa cards but allows payment by direct debit. Among other points raised, Lord Morrow mentioned that he wanted the service at Coleraine to be enhanced. That is an important way to look at the issue. The Minister highlighted an element of risk in the attitude that London will take towards it. It is important that looking at trying to create the fullest range of services is grasped as an opportunity. The enhancement of services available at Coleraine and, therefore, people's choice could be a win-win situation. Clearly, it is a matter of providing a higher level of service through Coleraine and ensuring that, although we might see integration, it will not simply be a centralisation of services in Swansea. That is important. I welcome the Minister's remarks in that regard.

It is, sometimes, as Lord Morrow said, a matter of thinking outside the box and trying to ensure that the full range of opportunities is available here. Ultimately, it comes back to trying to provide a decent service for everyone in Northern Ireland and ensuring that they have the same service opportunities as anyone else in the United Kingdom or even on the island of Ireland. Everyone in Northern Ireland should be able to use online facilities and the full range of post office facilities or to renew their tax by credit card.

In summary, I will reiterate Simon Hamilton's remarks. The motion is about creating, in many ways, a small change but one that has meaningful impact. I believe that the House can and will unite on that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes with concern that people in Northern Ireland are unable to avail themselves of all the car tax renewal methods that are available to people in Great Britain; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward proposals to address this problem.*

Adjourned at 5.27 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 25 October 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways

Mr Speaker: The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure wishes to make a statement.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) inland waterways meeting, which was held in Armagh on 12 October 2011.

The Executive were represented by me, as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and junior Minister Jonathan Bell from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Irish Government were represented by Jimmy Deenihan TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and Dinny McGinley TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht affairs. This statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

The Council received a progress report from Mr John Martin, chief executive of Waterways Ireland, on the work of Waterways Ireland, including the following significant achievements: the provision of 609 metres of additional moorings and ongoing maintenance of the waterways; the sponsorship of over 70 events to promote awareness of the waterways across all navigations; and the hosting of a successful meeting of the Waterways Forward INTERREG IVc project in Dublin and Enniskillen, which was attended by representatives from 17 organisations from 11 EU countries, as well as Norway and Serbia. The Council approved the Waterways Ireland corporate plan 2011-13 and business plan 2011 and recommended the budget provision. The Council discussed the main priorities for Waterways Ireland in 2012 and reviewed progress in finalising the business plan and budget for 2012.

The Council received a progress report on restoration work on the Clones to Upper Lough Erne section of the Ulster canal. Ministers noted that the strategic environmental assessment report and plan documents are now complete and have been published and that the environmental impact assessment is complete. The site investigation work is ongoing. Waterways Ireland has held meetings with all relevant statutory authorities to advise them on the project. Public meetings have also been held.

Detailed drawings of the route and associated facilities have been completed. Planning notices were forwarded to land owners in the North in the week commencing 26 September; notices were placed on lands in the South in the week commencing 3 October. The formal planning applications will be submitted to the relevant authorities in both jurisdictions this month.

The Council consented to a number of property disposals. It also received a presentation from Waterways Ireland on the future potential of waterways. The presentation focused on the economic benefits of waterways to the local community, recreation, tourism and the local and national economy. The Council agreed to hold its next inland waterways meeting in February 2012.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I note that the Council received a progress report on the restoration work on the Clones to Upper Lough Erne section of the Ulster canal and that work is under way on the environmental assessment reports and progress towards property disposals. I welcome that, as per the Committee's request, the Ulster canal project is

a standing item on the NSMC inland waterways meeting agenda.

The Committee raised questions about the financial sustainability of the Ulster canal project and wrote to the Minister about that. In response to the Committee's concerns, the Minister stated in a letter dated 21 October:

> *"The Irish Government is engaged at present in a Comprehensive Review of Expenditure under which all expenditure is being rigorously examined … Minister Deenihan has requested that all possible options that may assist with the advancement of the Ulster Canal project be examined and he has asked his Department officials, to keep in regular contact with Waterways Ireland with a view to advancing the project to the extent possible within the current constraints."*

That seems a far cry from a much needed financial commitment to the project. Will the Minister confirm that this is also her understanding of the current position of the Irish Government's commitment to fund the project?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for her question and, indeed, the Committee for its ongoing interest in the development of the Ulster canal. That is my exact understanding. The Ulster canal, and progress on it, was raised at the last sectoral meeting. There is nothing to say on the progress report from Mr Deenihan beyond the letter that the Chair read out. We were told that every opportunity to find out where the finances for the project are, particularly in the Irish Government, would be taken. It is an ongoing process, and the submission of planning notices and applications will proceed.

We have not been told that the money is not there and the project is not progressing. We have been told that there are budgetary constraints but that what can be done to progress the Ulster canal project is being done. I cannot give a figure for what funding is there at the minute, but we will certainly raise the issue and keep the Committee informed in due course.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin.

Will the Minister confirm whether the 2012 Waterways Ireland business plan will be approved at the next NSMC sectoral meeting?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The 2012 plan is still under review. It has gone through different periods of review. It is our intention to bring it forward as soon as possible, but I cannot give the Member a commitment that it will be cleared by February 2012. It is certainly my ambition and that of Mr Deenihan that that be realised, but, at this stage, I am not in a position to confirm that it will be ratified by February 2012.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement. The Waterways Ireland presentation highlighted the economic benefits to the local and national economy. What does the Minister see those economic benefits as being?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That issue has been raised before, and I thank Members for their ongoing interest. I fully appreciate that, particularly around waterways, we are talking about rural communities. I think that it was John Dallat who raised that before. It is really important, given the financial climate, that rural communities are not invisible when we talk about economic regeneration. To give a couple of examples, private boating contributes some €44 million and the hire sector some €20 million per annum. Indirect spend amounts to €100 million, providing 3,000 full-time jobs.

It includes visiting towns and villages beside the waterways, looking at tourism and where people go to spend money in restaurants and, maybe even, to use local hotels and B & Bs. It is really important that when looking at waterways we are not just looking at the activities that happen on them: the surrounding communities have to be integral to the development of any economic benefits for people who live and work in the vicinity.

Mrs McKevitt: I notice from the statement that the Council consented to a number of property disposals. Have any moneys been accrued from the disposal of properties and, if so, how will the moneys be deployed?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not have any detail on the amount of money that has been accrued or how it will be spent, but I will write to the Member and give her the detail.

Ms Lo: I am very pleased to hear about the progress of the Ulster canal. As the Minister said, it is wonderful for tourism. What is the estimated cost, and is there any likelihood of financial help from EU funds?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The estimated cost for the complete restoration of the canal is €171·5 million. The question has been raised before about additional support from Europe and about what my Department and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht are doing to maximise the benefits of European funding. The conference and dinner that we hosted, which I mentioned in the statement, is one way of sharing knowledge throughout European countries that have waterways-based economies and leisure tourism. In addition, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has asked that work be done on a cross-departmental basis regarding the Barroso task force.

We need to find out what additional opportunities there are to secure European funding, not just for waterways but for DCAL projects across the range of the Department. It is really important that there is additional funding rather than funding instead of. We need a full complement before us to realise the success of some of those projects. I am very aware of the need to maximise, particularly for big structural projects like this. To go back to the cost, it is 171 million pounds, not euro. I want to make that correction.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister provide an outline of what her Department is doing to enhance greater opportunities from the European funding programmes?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Thank you for the question. In addition to what I have just outlined to the Member for South Belfast, it is important that the Barroso task force look at the entire economy of the island. In my Department I have asked officials to look specifically at opportunities in languages, waterways, arts, culture and sport. Some projects in the community have already done that and are looking for Department funds to complement what they have already secured, on the basis that it may be matched funding. Moreover, we need to interrogate better and further opportunities to make sure that we bring more opportunities for groups that are trying to develop projects that will deliver very good services and facilities.

10.45 am

Mr Sheehan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas.

I thank the Minister for her statement. Do she and her counterpart in the South, Jimmy Deenihan, have any plans to appoint a board for Waterways Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: At this stage, the appointment of a board is down to the outworkings of the ongoing review of the Good Friday Agreement. If, when that review is complete, the recommendation is that a board should be appointed, then that is what will happen.

Mr D Bradley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. Tá ceist agam don Aire faoin chanáil in Iúr Cinn Trá. What actions need to be taken to have Newry canal included in the remit of Waterways Ireland? Does the Minister support such a move?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member and his colleague raised that issue when last I answered questions about North/South sectoral meetings. He already knows that the Newry/Portadown canal is not within our remit; it is not one of the seven waterways for which we are responsible. I support any community that tries to seize opportunities, particularly for developing tourism and the economy, or even just for the aesthetic value that they can bring to facilities that have been run down or closed. The Member may also be aware that we need legislative change to allow for further development of the canals. I am supportive of communities and groups that come together to identify potential assets in their areas and who are doing their best to restore them.

Mr Allister: Waterways Ireland is not a commercial organisation; it is essentially a management body. Can I, therefore, take you back to the issue of asset disposal? Are the properties that are being disposed of the same ones that you referred to in your statement in September? Where are they, and who gets the proceeds?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not know whether the Member was in the Chamber when this question was raised by Ms McKevitt.

Mr Allister: It is a different question.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Regardless of that, the same answer will be given to Mr Allister. We will find out where those disposals are and we will list what happened to the money, where it was accrued and where it is going.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for her statement. Has any consideration been given

to the potential effect of hydraulic fracturing on inland waterways in the counties of Leitrim and Fermanagh and the water-based activities that take place in those areas?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have to admit that I have no idea what hydraulic fracturing is. Had this been a debate on a motion I would have happily given way and allowed the Member to explain it. The activities on the waterways in Lough Erne and on the other canals all the way across are really important, and if the Member is talking about the impact of water-based tourism on the environment, a balance needs to be struck. However, even within environmental impact assessments, Waterways Ireland's primary focus is on ensuring that there is maintenance, and that there are proper opportunities for water-based tourism and regeneration of local economies, both of which are complementary; they are not in opposition to each other.

North/South Ministerial Council: Language Body

Mr Speaker: The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure wishes to make a further statement to the Assembly.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the thirteenth North/South Ministerial Council Language Body meeting, the ninth since the restoration of the Executive and the Assembly and the first held in 2011. The statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell, who was the accompanying Minister.

I attended the meeting in Armagh on 12 October, representing the Executive as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, along with Jonathan Bell MLA, junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The Irish Government were represented by Jimmy Deenihan TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs, and Dinny McGinley TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht affairs.

The meeting dealt with issues relating to the language body and its two constituent agencies, tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch and Foras na Gaeilge. I will now present a summary of the issues that were discussed by the Council on 12 October 2011.

The Council received progress reports from Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency on the collaborative work and other activities of the two agencies. Those include further development of the lecture series 'Aspects of our Shared Heritage' to include a new lecture on the history of the languages dealing with the Flight of the Earls, the plantation of Ulster and their linguistic effects; co-operation with the Lyric Theatre and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to produce an award-winning play about the work in the mills; and provision of joint information stands recently at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the Castlewellan agricultural show, the Stormont family fun day and the bocce world cup. Preparations are also in hand for a joint cultural showcase in Belfast that will support the twinning of Listowel in County Kerry with Downpatrick in County Down.

In addition, the Council received progress reports on sharing expertise and resources on a range of corporate and HR issues; the implementation by Foras na Gaeilge of the accreditation scheme for editors, including provision of specialised training and ongoing development by Foras na Gaeilge of the national database of terms, which can be found at www.focal.ie; and delivery by the Ulster-Scots Agency of music and dance tuition to over 8,000 participants through the peripatetic tutor programme and 31 Ulster-Scots community summer schemes.

The Council discussed progress on the development of the North/South Language Body's corporate plan 2011-13 and the business plan and budget 2011. Ministers noted that the draft 2012 business plans for Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency have been prepared, with the plans focusing on each agency's key priorities. The draft plans are awaiting approval from the respective boards before submission to the sponsor and Finance Departments for approval. The finalised plans will be brought forward for approval by the NSMC at a future meeting.

The NSMC noted that the 2008 annual report and draft accounts have been submitted to the comptroller and auditor general (C&AG) in each jurisdiction, and, following certification and consolidation, they will be laid before the Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas as soon as possible. Ministers further noted that audit fieldwork has been completed in respect of the 2009 annual report and accounts, and consolidation will follow as soon as possible. Draft accounts have been filed in respect of 2010, and dates are awaited from the comptrollers and auditors general in regard to audit fieldwork. Ministers also noted that a new simplified consolidation process will be introduced, subject to the approval of Finance Departments. A further progress report on those matters will be made at the next NSMC language body meeting.

The NSMC noted that the board of Foras na Gaeilge has extended the contract of the chief executive officer of Foras na Gaeilge, Ferdie Mac an Fhailigh, for a further period of five years.

Ministers noted the progress that has been made to date by Foras na Gaeilge with regard to the preparation of a portfolio of draft schemes for the new competitive funding model, which has the objective of achieving significant benefits around value for money and the effective delivery of Foras na Gaeilge's statutory obligations. Having considered that progress, the NSMC requested Foras na Gaeilge to take forward a further 12-week consultation about the portfolio of draft schemes, particularly with the core funded bodies; ensure that relevant statutory bodies are given the opportunity to consider the impact of the draft schemes on their areas of operation; amend the portfolio of draft schemes as necessary and appropriate, having regard to the extended consultation process; prepare a detailed business case, with independent assistance if necessary, in support of the portfolio of draft schemes; and to prepare a revised project plan in conjunction with the sponsor Departments that will have due regard to the completion of the review process as a matter of urgency.

The NSMC agreed that an order be made at the appropriate time under section 28(2)(b) of the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999 to delete the reference to the organisations that are listed in the table to the section. Ministers requested a further progress report at the next NSMC language body meeting.

The NSMC noted the completion of the review of Áis, which is the book distribution service of Foras na Gaeilge, and requested that Foras na Gaeilge agree a detailed implementation plan with the sponsor Departments in regard to the recommendations in the review of Áis and report on progress at the next NSMC language body meeting. The Council agreed to hold its next language body meeting in February 2012.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): During the previous NSMC statement to the House, considerable concern was raised about the delays to the publication of the annual reports and accounts for the North/South Language Body. Can the Minister be more specific about the timetable for the introduction of the new simplified consolidation process and provide assurances that there will be no further delays in the publication of future annual reports and accounts?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question on what has been an ongoing theme, particularly with regard to the accounting and reporting mechanisms. The problem goes back to well before my time, but I appreciate that there are concerns about the reporting

processes, which the Committee has articulated. I am not in a position to say that, by February 2012, all of that will be agreed and sorted out. However, I am in a position to say that everything that can be done on auditing and accounting procedures is being done by both Departments and both Finance Ministers to ensure that there is an easier process for the Council's reporting and, indeed, for consolidation. In due course, the accounts will be laid in the Assembly and the Oireachtas, and, notwithstanding that, they will need to be passed at the next NSMC meeting. It is our ambition to do everything that we can to achieve that target, but I am not in a position to say that that will be the case.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas.

Can the Minister confirm that the Ulster-Scots Agency has not yet reached its full staff complement? If so, what effect has that had on the delivery of its needs and services?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The Ulster-Scots Agency is proactively trying to fill its full staff complement as we speak. That has had no effect on its delivery, either to groups or communities, or on its progress on monitoring procedures and reporting to both Departments. I am content that the Ulster-Scots Agency is doing everything in its power to achieve its full complement of staff.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement. Minister, you referred to the implementation by Foras na Gaeilge of the accreditation scheme for editors, including the provision of specialised training and the ongoing development by Foras na Gaeilge of a national database of terms. Is the Minister aware of anything similar by Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch, and, if not, will she pursue that matter with it?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware that there are similar projects, but they are at completely different levels. I have met the Ulster-Scots Agency and the ministerial advisory group on Ulster Scots, and we discussed that and several other matters. I am not pushing, nudging or suggesting that groups go down that road if they are not ready. If they are working towards that and need support and help from us to achieve targets, that is completely different. I would not suggest that the Ulster-Scots Agency should be at the same level of accreditation as Foras na Gaeilge; it is just not there yet.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas arís leis an Aire as an ráiteas seo ar an Fhoras Teanga. I thank the Minister for her statement on the language body.

Cuirim fáilte roimh an síneadh a cuireadh leis an tréimhse chomhairliúcháin do na grúpaí bun-mhaoinithe. I welcome the 12-week extension to the consultation on the proposals for the core-funded groups. Can the Minister assure us that those who respond to that consultation will be listened to and that, in due course, the proposals will be changed?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question and, indeed, his ongoing interest in the issue of core funding for the groups that are involved with the Irish language. We listened to what people said, including the Committee and many others. In previous consultations, there was a perception that people felt that they could not participate fully or as much as they would have liked. Having listened to everything that everyone had said, we decided, with the approval of the NSMC, to have an additional 12-week consultation. It is extremely cynical to suggest that we will put something out for consultation and not listen to what people have to say.

11.00 am

Mr D Bradley: I asked you a question.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I want it on the record that the schemes are there in draft form. I implore people to use as fully as possible this opportunity to participate in the consultation. I refer not just to the core-funded groups but to the constituencies that rely on the services of those groups and the statutory bodies that have operational links with them. If the draft schemes need amended or changed to meet the needs of the core-funded groups and those constituencies, this is the opportunity to do that.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her statement. The Minister talked about the core-funded groups in the North. Before I came to the Chamber this morning, I was at a meeting with the Irish language sector. Those core-funded organisations are very concerned about funding status, because they have funding until only Christmas. Can the Minister shed some light on that, please?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is welcome that the Member attended that event. I do not know where Christmas as a date came from, so I will clarify for the Member and for other Members that the funding is until June 2012.

I share the concerns of any group that is trying to secure additional and future funding. I worked in the community and voluntary sector for over 12 years, and I know exactly what it is like to live on protective notice from one three-month period to another. It is not a good place to be, and I do not think that it helps the sector. The sector feels as though it is almost an afterthought rather than being, as it should be, at the heart of government.

That having been said, the draft schemes are there for consultation, and I cannot envisage a better time for people to give their views, opinions and ideas on better service delivery not only to make sure that the people who need the services get them in a much more efficient and effective way but to ensure the long-term future of the core-funded groups and their work.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for her statement. Having raised this matter previously, I note that discussions have taken place regarding corporate and HR issues. Considering the general economic difficulties facing government, can the Minister give us further details on those matters?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Maybe the suggestion behind the question is about how the funding for all-Ireland bodies such as those for waterways and languages does not help to deliver economic benefits in some way. I do not know whether that is where the Member is coming from, but I can clearly say, as I have said in previous statements on those bodies, that they help the economy through employment, the development of skills and future sustainability. If the Member would like to write to me about something specific, I would be happy to answer that.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she outline joint projects delivered by Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Some projects were listed in the statement, such as the provision of joint stands at the Boccia World Cup, the Stormont family fun day and the Castlewellan agricultural show. However, one dimension that deals with aspects of our shared heritage is a series of joint lectures run by Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency. That series covers subjects and topics on shared musical heritage, place names and the influence of indigenous languages. Each agency also has a list of lecturers. The use of past experience to develop that dimension in conjunction with both agencies so that new programmes can be brought forward is happening as we speak. However, the work that the agencies have engaged in so far together has been very good, particularly in helping to promote shared and better relations.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas arís leis an Aire as a ráiteas. Will the Minister tell us what has caused the delay in publishing the North/South accounts and reports?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I spoke briefly to the Committee Chair about some of the delays. In 2000 and 2001, the Northern Ireland Audit Office qualified the accounts. There was a delay in signing off on the bodies' consolidated accounts. That did eventually happen in 2004, and, as a result of the delay, the 2000 reports and accounts were not published until 2005. Subsequent annual reports and accounts were also delayed as the Northern Ireland Audit Office audits the accounts on a chronological basis. So, as I mentioned to the Chair in a previous answer, I appreciate that that issue has been ongoing, but I am content that Minister Deenihan and I, both sets of auditors and, indeed, both Finance Ministers are working towards better reporting of accounts and an easier and more effective way of consolidating both sets of accounts.

Mrs McKevitt: I also thank the Minister for her statement. Has she had any discussions about the Irish language legislation with her counterparts from the South, and, if so, what has she learned that would be useful for us up here?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not had any detailed discussions with my counterparts in the South on the legislation, but I understand that their strategy is for 20 years. Between the North/South sectoral meetings, I will have further meetings on legislation, Acht na Gaeilge and strategies for the Irish language and Ulster Scots.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Arís eile, gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an ráitis atá os ár gcomhair inniu. Maidir leis an phlean chorporáideach agus gnó, tchím anseo go ndearna an tAire tagairt don dul chun cinn ar fhorbairt an phlean chorporáidigh sin. An féidir liom ceist a chur ar an Aire an

féidir léi tuilleadh eolais a thabhairt dúinn ar an dul chun cinn ar an méid a rinneadh? I thank the Minister for her statement, in which she referred to progress being made on the development of the North/South Language Body corporate plan. Will she provide us with some detail on the progress that was made?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The detail on the Foras na Gaeilge languages corporate plan was that, first, the staff complement that was needed for Áis, the book project, has been achieved. So, the potential for making money has been realised. That was not realised until the last sectoral meeting, when we agreed the complement of staff. We have further secured the additional five years for the chief executive, and that will give some security. Indeed, progress has been made on an agreement for the corporate plan, which looked at whether the consultation on core-funded organisations should continue for a further 12 weeks. Given the nature of core funding, both Ministers agree that it is really important that everybody uses the opportunity to feed into the consultation, and, when the consultation progresses and reports are made, that will be fed into further and the revision will be made into a corporate plan for Foras na Gaeilge.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for her statement and immediately apologise for raising the issue of the late return of accounts. I do it because I am sure that the Minister will agree that that is a really handy way of knocking North/South bodies. Can she assure the House that this is the last time that this issue will dominate questions on the North/South Language Body?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I do not think for one minute that he is raising it just to make a point; he has raised it consistently. Unfortunately, the delay in the accounts has been raised consistently. It is worth repeating that everything that can be done will be done, and it is also worth noting that the delay was caused in 2000 and 2001 — Danny is smirking — on the watch of Michael McGimpsey, when the chair of the Ulster-Scots Agency, Lord Laird, refused to sign the accounts. Ever since then, there has been a bottleneck in the system. Notwithstanding that, there are — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Minister to continue.

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are concerns because both jurisdictions have different accounting procedures and different processes. They need to be harmonised and consolidated to make sure that I am not standing here after each sectoral meeting making the same apology.

Mr Allister: I shall stay with the issue of accounts. What does the fact that this issue is still being attended to a decade on say about accountability and transparency? Ministers have been promising for years that they have been working towards, to use this Minister's words, the resolution of this matter, yet the accounts and annual reports for 2008, 2009 or 2010 have still not seen the light of day. What sort of ministerial oversight allows that scandal to continue? Does the Minister just not care?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I totally care about the process of accountability. The Member has raised this before, and, each time, his concerns bounce from one section of the issue to another. The fact of the matter is that both bodies — Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency — through my Department and the Departments in the South, are in keeping with and above what we expect of them in their accounts and accounts management, as well as in their spending performance. The difficulty has been caused by a legacy of bottlenecks in the accounts procedures. As I said — the Member was here when I said it — this started in 2000 and 2001. As for accountability, the fact that I am standing here talking about these delays and giving explanations, albeit that the Member and others are not happy and do not like it, is the process to which the Assembly is signed up.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. That ends questions on the ministerial statement.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption.]* I hope that is not me. Mr Speaker, I apologise for that. Clearly, senior executives in Roads Service did not know where I was.

For some strange reason, the Minister, in one of her later responses, chose to mention me by name. I was having a perfectly innocent time in the Chamber and smiled weakly at her to encourage her in what seemed to be a very difficult situation. What protocols are there that would enable the Minister to somehow chastise me and seek to apportion blame for a situation that I have no responsibility for but that chiefly seems to be her fault? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I have listened very carefully to what Mr Kennedy has said in his point of order. Perhaps this is an issue that both Executive Ministers could resolve outside the Chamber. They could try to have a conversation to resolve it.

Private Members' Business

Maze Prison Site

Mr Speaker: As two amendments have been selected, the Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 45 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Elliott: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly recognises the potential social and economic benefits which the utilisation of former security sites, such as the site of the Maze prison, can bring to Northern Ireland; notes with concern the proposals to build a "peace-building and conflict resolution centre" at the site; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to develop this site in a way which is practical and inoffensive to victims.*

The issue of the Maze site is clearly of significant relevance and strategic importance to Northern Ireland, as are the former military sites. I have looked at some of those sites and their ongoing development. Ilex in Londonderry is developing the Ebrington site as well as Fort George. Having recently visited the area with colleagues, I have seen that the ongoing development there is significant and will hopefully be a major boost to the north-west in a very short time. Obviously, that can only be good for Northern Ireland. I also note the proposals for the Lisanelly site in Omagh, where the proposed educational campus is planned, although there appears to be some delay with that. I am pleased that the First Minister and the Acting deputy First Minister are here. I am not sure whether the latter, in his role as Education Minister, can enlighten us any further at this stage as to progress at Lisanelly. However, that may be a debate for another day.

11.15 am

I want to see development at the Maze that will enhance Northern Ireland strategically and be of huge importance to the entire community. The consultative group and consultation panel met some time ago, and I think that all the main political parties in Northern Ireland were represented. They brought forward proposals to the Ministers at that time, and the direct rule Ministers then brought forward the Maze master plan, as I call it, which included the national stadium, the conflict transformation centre and the equestrian centre of excellence as well as potential economic development and housing. It seemed to be work in progress at that time. However, at some stage in OFMDFM the whole master plan was pulled, and the Department started to look at new developments.

I am pleased that the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society is looking at the site. Hopefully, those discussions are ongoing and will come to a positive conclusion in the near future. Obviously, there is quite an incentive for it to move. It would be a huge opportunity for the organisation to have a site outside Belfast and somewhere that would be more accessible for big events.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports the concept of a peace-building centre and wants to see that happening. At this stage and given it in isolation, we do not believe that the Maze site is the most appropriate site because of its historical nature. If it were developed along with the rest of the proposals in the Maze master plan, it would be a much bigger and wider development, and Northern Ireland could have a series of developments on site that could bring huge capability to the whole of Northern Ireland.

I praise the Ulster Aviation Society, which does a huge amount of good work at the Maze. I have visited its site and seen what is on display. The exhibitions are great, and I hope that there will be support for that proposal to be developed. The society is a voluntary organisation, and many individuals put a lot of work into it.

The Ulster Unionist Party has concerns about the current proposal for the conflict centre, the resolution centre or the conflict transformation centre — whatever name is put on it. Some time ago, I asked to see the application form for the funding for the centre. I did not get it, and I am not sure what the proposals are with regard to the development process. If there were less secrecy about the proposal, maybe we could look at it in a more strategic and definitive manner. Hopefully, that can go out for consultation at some stage. I would like to hear from the First Minister or the Acting deputy First Minister about how much consultation there has been on the current proposal for the conflict transformation centre and the responses

that have been received. I have received representation from victims' groups who have significant concerns about the proposal for a stand-alone centre.

There is a huge gap now. We have missed out on the overall Maze development that was in the master plan. I assume that the First Minister or Acting deputy First Minister will bring forward ideas today on where we are going with the entire project. I know that they are in the process of setting up the body corporation. Maybe they can give us some insight into where that is going.

At this stage, we have significant concerns about the conflict transformation centre, especially in light of the fact that we do not have the information on the funding application and it was not made available to us, and we have concerns about the proposal itself.

Finally, I understand that a funding application of £20 million has been put forward to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Mr A Maginness: The Member has indicated that he has concerns about the conflict transformation centre. Will the Member expand on the concerns that were expressed to him by victims or victims' groups or, alternatively or in addition, the concerns that he and his party have about the centre?

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for that. The concerns are from victims' groups, in particular. They believe that it could be some sort of terrorist shrine. Since there is so much secrecy and we do not have the information on it, we, or I in particular, cannot answer their questions. That is the main concern. I would like to address those concerns. I would like to give those people some type of positive answer. If we can do that, so much the better.

My final point relates to the £20 million application to the SEUPB. Is that additional money coming into Northern Ireland through Peace funding, or is it part of the Peace III money that will be taken away from other community groups on the ground, which, in these times of austerity, are in very bad need of that money? If it is additional money, it is, obviously, beneficial; if it is coming out of the block that we already get, we need to know that, and we need to know what groups will suffer because of it.

Mr Eastwood: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "Northern Ireland;" and insert

> *"acknowledges that the transformation of the Maze/Long Kesh site into a peace-building and conflict resolution centre must have due regard to the needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to prioritise this need whilst urgently progressing a development and job creation strategy for the site."*

The former Maze/Long Kesh site offers an opportunity that, to date, has been missed, and I hope that it is not too late. Our amendment calls for that opportunity to be fully utilised. There is obvious potential economic benefit to be had from it. It would have a positive impact on the construction sector, and it has the potential to provide a boost in tourism numbers. However, that potential will be fulfilled only if the Executive implement a jobs creation and investment strategy for the site. The site also provides a tremendous opportunity for the Balmoral show. If it were transferred to the site, it could create a major agriculture show for the whole island, second only to the national ploughing championships.

The Maze/Long Kesh site reminds us of the utter failure of the Assembly to address the issues around our troubled past. The conflict transformation centre proposed for the site can and should play an important role in addressing that issue. If such a centre is to be truly worthwhile, it should be centred on real and hard issues. It should not be a centre for self-congratulation. The residues of the conflict are still real and raw. That is evident in the victims' and survivors' continuing frustration that the Executive have not agreed a comprehensive mechanism for dealing with the past. There is also the residue of paramilitarism, with attacks on our people and our peace, not least in my own city of Derry.

There is an opportunity for the centre to be tasked with dealing with the coming decade of centenaries. The transformative decade that shaped the island for the last century through conflict, identity and the tragedy of partition is set to be celebrated or commemorated throughout Ireland. Our complex past is, therefore, very much on the horizon of our immediate future. The commemorations of the signing of the Ulster covenant and those of the Somme, the Easter rising, the civil war and, ultimately, partition are events that need the combined leadership of all strands of political

opinion and leadership on this island. The conflict transformation centre should be tasked with giving the necessary expertise to ensure that the forthcoming debate and reflection on our history is approached in a mature and responsible fashion.

Given the recession, I hope that it is not too late. It is true that the Maze/Long Kesh site has the potential not only to have a major impact on the area's economic future but to allow a mature discussion to be had about our past. Hopefully, that will help in some way to bring reconciliation closer.

Mr Givan: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out "with concern".

I want to address some of the other points that have not yet been covered. It is unfortunate that the first two contributions majored immediately on the conflict transformation centre. Let us remind ourselves of what the Maze/Long Kesh site is capable of delivering. It is a 350-acre strategic development opportunity that is twice the size of the Titanic Quarter. It is located directly beside the Blaris site, which is 400 acres and which has been given approval, in principle, in the Department of the Environment's master plan for the area. I feel that the Maze site and the Blaris site could create a massive opportunity for job creation in Northern Ireland. It is important that we set the context correctly for all this.

It has been estimated that 60% of the population can reach the Maze site within 30 minutes and that 80% of our population can reach it within one hour. It has the best access routes from the west, south and north of the Province, and, strategically, its location in relation to the Republic of Ireland will allow it to capitalise on flights coming in to Dublin airport. The site has the potential to create massive investment opportunities, and the master plan for the site indicated that up to 6,000 jobs could be created. At this time of economic difficulty, it is important that we drive forward the opportunity that the site presents.

The history of the site has quite a range of interests. Originally, in the vocabulary of the local people, it was known as Long Kesh. It was a site for the Royal Air Force, when it was known officially as RAF Long Kesh. Indeed, the British military association with the site, prior to its becoming a prison, is one that we can have immense pride in. When I spoke on this issue in the House before the previous election, I pointed out some of that history. The site was visited by President Eisenhower during the Second World War and by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Indeed, the first flight taken by our own queen, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, was to RAF Long Kesh. Members need to be aware of that history and not just of the more commonly known recent history that relates to the prison. That is why I have a particular difficulty when republicans consistently refer to the site as "Long Kesh". Clearly, there is a drive to romanticise what happened during the period when the site was a prison, particularly on the part of republicans. However, there was no romanticism during that period. That was a period of our past that was wrong and that should never have happened. We should never allow what happened to be forgotten, particularly by those who were incarcerated during that period. We should also not allow the term "Long Kesh" to be hijacked by republicans. The site was commonly and locally known as Long Kesh in the past, and I have no difficulty in referring to it as Long Kesh or, officially, as the Maze/Long Kesh.

In the more recent past, the site became known as HMP Maze, and we can never forget what happened during that period. I will particularly never forget the fact that 29 prison officers lost their life during our conflict. I declare an interest, because family members of mine served in the Prison Service.

Many more were injured physically during the time that they served in our prisons and particularly at the Maze. Many who had to work in that institution still bear the mental hallmarks of the period. We can never forget the sacrifice that was paid by those individuals during that time.

11.30 am

The motion particularly notes the conflict resolution centre. Given that it was tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party, I find it very difficult to understand why that party has highlighted this particular issue. Of all parties, it has its hallmarks all over the fact that the conflict resolution centre ever got on to the paper that was produced by the direct rule Ministers. It was the Maze consultation panel's final report of 2005 that recommended that there should be an international centre for conflict resolution. I and my party supported that recommendation at the time, and we still support it. However, the hypocrisy coming from the Benches of the Ulster

Unionist Party is completely and utterly rank. Over the weekend, at that party's conference, its chairman, David Campbell, said that he felt that the contribution made by the party over the past decade has not been recognised or valued in how it moved the process on.

I want to pay tribute to David Campbell, the chairman of the Ulster Unionist Party, for the work that he has done in moving Northern Ireland forward, particularly for his work as chairman of the Maze consultation panel that produced the 2005 report. I will cite a couple of the recommendations that came out of that report under his chairmanship. The report says:

> *"We believe that the site would be an ideal location for an International Centre for Conflict Transformation and as such has the potential to play an important part in promoting a shared society."*

Now, the leader of that party says that it does not believe that the Maze is an ideal location for a conflict transformation centre. That is not what the current chairman of the Ulster Unionist Party said when he was chairman of the Maze panel.

The report went on to say:

> *"The development of an International Centre for Conflict Transformation would add considerably to the synergy of the other proposed developments, and help to establish the international profile and identity of the Maze/Long Kesh."*

So, the panel recommended that the proposal would work with all the other aspects that were proposed for the industrial and commercial development of the site and would sit well with and support the promotion of the entire site.

Obviously, there was concern, and the Member referred to it, that the site could become a shrine. That exercised our minds and those of the party on the Benches beside me at the time. I supported the recommendation of the panel chaired by David Campbell of the Ulster Unionist Party, which was:

> *"The facility would be a neutral, inclusive and constructive 'place apart', to be used by organisations and communities to further the cause of conflict transformation."*

It was to be a "neutral" site. Just to be absolutely clear, the report made another recommendation:

> *"To be successful, it will be essential for the facility to be genuinely neutral and inclusive, and not perceived as being owned by any one section of society."*

So, let us be clear: there will be no shrine at the Maze. There never will be. The site was never envisaged as a shrine. As long as my party holds the position of First Minister, we will ensure that there will never be a shrine at the Maze.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: No, I will not give way; I want to continue my speech.

When the Ulster Unionist Party raises this issue, it does a disservice to those whom it purports to represent, namely, the victims. It uses the victims in a very callous manner in order to try to make a political issue of a site that has the potential to drive economic regeneration in Northern Ireland.

Given the work done by David Campbell, along with that done by this party, to ensure that the centre would never be a shrine, the Ulster Unionist Party should reflect on what it does in using victims to politicise this issue.

If the Members beside me were genuinely interested in victims, why did they support the Belfast Agreement and thereby agree to prisoners being released from the Maze? It was not my party but the party beside me that released those prisoners. It signed up to an agreement under which prisoners were released, causing hurt and harm to victims who had suffered during that period. I will not take that hypocrisy from the Members opposite. We have ensured that the Maze site will never become a shrine, as has our First Minister. I pay tribute to David Campbell who joined with our party to ensure that the site never becomes a shrine. I, therefore, commend my party's amendment to the House. I will also be supporting the SDLP's amendment.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo, nó is tionscadal an-tábhachtach é ar fad. Beimid ag tabhairt tacaíochta don dá leasú.

History or, indeed, her story is very subjective, especially in a society that is coming out of conflict. We all have our starting points and analyses, and we are all very affected by our experiences and those of the communities that we represent. There is validity to all our histories, or her stories, whether you are a republican, a loyalist, a member of the British

Army, a member of the RUC, someone who has worked at Long Kesh, or someone who has been a guest there. We obviously do not all agree with one another. We all have differing and varying analyses of the root causes of the conflict and different views on the role of the British state in the conflict. However, I hope that we have moved to a situation where each of us recognises that people from every community have suffered, that in our society many people are disadvantaged and marginalised and that each of us is trying to build a better future for all our people.

Last week, I was in University College Dublin (UCD) debating with Basil McCrea, Jim Wells and Peter Weir. We obviously aired our differences there, but what struck me and, indeed, the audience during and after the debate was that we all supported the peace process and felt that we are in a better place than we were in the past and that change is badly needed in our society. No one should be afraid of supporting diversity and equality, of making our society more inclusive and of studying the root causes of our conflict so that it never happens again. Those who ignore our history are destined to repeat it.

The 360-acre site provides us with a unique opportunity to export our experience of peace-building and conflict resolution, difficult as it has been, through support for delegations to and from different parts of the world that are emerging from conflict. It provides us with the possibility of maximising the economic, historical and reconciliation potential of the site. It also provides us with an opportunity to support research and practical learning. It has the potential to provide us with an opportunity for all stories to be told, including those about the prison, World War II, the peace process and international experiences. It would provide much-needed jobs for the construction and tourism industries and help to further develop the Belfast-Dublin corridor.

I, along with the OFMDFM Committee, visited the Long Kesh site, the prison and the Ulster Aviation Society hangar. I listened to Tom Elliott, who was part of that delegation, speaking on 'Hearts and Minds' the other night about his party's support for equality. So, my question to the UUP and Tom is this: what are you afraid of? Why the selective approach? What is needed here is leadership, not hollow words about equality — ceannaireacht — Ar aghaidh linn le chéile. Tá todhchaí níos éagsúla de dhíth orainn go léir.

Let us continue to work together to build a diverse, dynamic future and a society that is at ease with itself and provides opportunities for all our citizens. Let us not play politics with victims.

Mr Lunn: It is good to get an opportunity to revisit the issue of the Maze site. I am grateful to Mr Elliott and his colleagues for bringing the matter back to the House, even though I do not particularly agree with their motion.

The motion has three parts to it. Mr Elliott clarified the situation with the conflict transformation centre. It is quite obvious — correct me if I am wrong — that he does not want such a centre in any format at the Maze, so we will not be supporting the motion. However, we are happy to support the SDLP amendment and, if necessary, the DUP amendment.

The Member who spoke previously referred to the consultation panel. I sat on the final consultation panel for the Maze under the chairmanship of Mr Poots, who is here today. Certainly, it was my impression that all parties agreed that there would be a conflict transformation centre as part of the overall master plan for the Maze site. That was during direct rule. We definitely saw such a centre as part of the development. Again, I stand ready to be corrected, but I think that the Ulster Unionists were represented on that panel and were fully —

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that that was in the overall context of the Maze master plan and not of a stand-alone conflict transformation centre, as I have explained?

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

Mr Lunn: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I accept that at that time, it was in the context of overall development. However, we are still talking about the overall development of the site.

Mr Elliott: — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Lunn: I will come to that. We should not talk in piecemeal terms about the site but about its overall development. As far as I am concerned, the only possible site for the type of conflict transformation centre that was envisaged by all

parties at that time is on part of the Maze site. It does not make any sense to put it anywhere else. I heard the suggestion that a centre could go somewhere else in Northern Ireland, but I really do not think so.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: No, thank you.

We have heard so much about the Maze development. I wonder why no serious progress has been made. In 2001, I joined Lisburn City Council. That was 10 years ago. The Maze development was a live issue then. I suppose that it is still a live issue. I do not mean to be flippant in any way, Mr Speaker. However, so far, some old buildings have been demolished and a nice new entrance has been put up. That is about it. I am aware that there has been remedial work, decontamination, and so on, but, basically, nothing has happened.

We have also abandoned what a lot of us thought was an excellent stadium proposal for reasons that are, perhaps, not unconnected with the other topic that we are talking about, namely the conflict transformation centre, or, to put it in another way, unionists' inability to countenance, at that time, a conflict transformation centre or a stadium somewhere other than Belfast. I note that the DUP amendment removes the issue of concern about the principle of such a centre. That indicates that the party is now on board. Mr Givan confirmed that quite adequately. The DUP will now agree to the centre as long as it is practical and inoffensive.

Obviously, there is ongoing concern about a terrorist shrine. I wonder what it is about that proposal that continues to frighten unionists. Our history and the path to peace in Northern Ireland are matters of world interest. The history of the Maze is integral to that. I take Mr Givan's point in particular about the wider history of the Maze. However, there is no doubt that the main focus of world attention has been on the past 40 years. The Maze prison is absolutely central to that.

The Maze panel had information on similar projects around the world. Some were based in disused prisons, others were not. The fear that the one at the Maze could become some kind of a shrine or place of pilgrimage really has no foundation whatsoever. The history to be told covers all sections of society. There is no way that a properly planned centre would be allowed to evolve in any other way. The project would have to be controlled by OFMDFM either directly or through the medium of the Maze development corporation. That is another body that it seems to be taking an eternity to establish. Perhaps the First Minister can update the House on progress towards its establishment. I think that it has now been over a year since the promised implementation date was passed.

The SDLP amendment makes sense. My party will support it even though I could be pedantic and point out that it seems to refer to the whole site when only a few acres of it are needed for a transformation centre. It also expresses the need to progress urgently a development and job creation strategy for the site. That wish is reflected in the original motion. I hope that the First Minister will comment on that as well.

At the moment, there is an empty site of over 300 acres. There is a discontinued stadium plan and master plan that cost several million pounds. The only semi-concrete proposal is the one for the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS). I wonder whether it is having second thoughts. Is there any other genuine expression of interest in using the site? Again, perhaps the First Minister can enlighten us.

Progress is so painfully slow. We really do need some activity, action and regeneration — not regeneration of the site but regeneration of the process.

11.45 am

Mr Poots: This is a very interesting subject, and it is very interesting that the Ulster Unionists have brought the matter forward now. One can see only rank hypocrisy from the Ulster Unionist Benches.

For many years, the Maze site was a matter of discussion. I have been integrally involved from the outset — along with the Ulster Unionist Party, I have to say. David Campbell was chairman of the Maze consultation panel for many years. I sat under his chairmanship, just as the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party now sits under his chairmanship. Through working intensively on the issues, we arrived at a position that was acceptable to the Ulster Unionist Party then and to the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party then. Indeed, it was acceptable to the Democratic Unionist Party then. The difference is that it is still acceptable

to the Democratic Unionist Party, because we dealt with the issues at the time.

It was made very clear by the then direct rule Ministers that it was not up to the panel members to make a decision on behalf of their parties. Rather, they had to be able to demonstrate that they had their parties' support. Mr Campbell received the support of the Ulster Unionist Party for the proposal to develop the conflict transformation centre at the site. In 2005, I received the support of the Democratic Unionist Party for that development. As I recall, the proposal went to the party officers of the Democratic Unionist Party, and everyone in the Chamber will know that the party officers at that time included Mr Allister, who sheds crocodile tears over the issue now yet did not raise it as an issue then.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: I will give way if it is a genuine intervention.

Mr Allister: It is indeed. Before he gets obsessed with my position, he might like to reflect on the position of his deputy leader, Mr Nigel Dodds, who is on record as saying:

> *"However it is dressed up, whatever spin is deployed, the preservation of a section of the H-Blocks — including the hospital wing — would become a shrine to the terrorists who committed suicide in the Maze in the 1980s ... That would be obnoxious to the vast majority of people and is something unionist people cannot accept."*

Therefore, before the Member turns his attention to me, who never assented to any shrine, would he like to deal with how it is that his deputy leader seemed to have and still has — for he has never repudiated his statement — the same concerns? That raises the question: if you need a conflict resolution centre, why do you need to retain the buildings? Why do you need it at the Maze?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have reminded the House on so many occasions that interventions should not be long statements.

Mr Poots: I see that Mr Allister has reverted to his usual tactic of washing his hands of the issues — the Pontius Pilate.

Mr Allister: What about Nigel Dodds?

Mr Poots: Mr Allister was there in 2005 when the proposal came forward, and he did not object to it then.

Mr Allister: What about Nigel Dodds?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: Nor did Mr Allister, or any of the Ulster Unionists, object to the buildings' being listed in the first instance. The record will show who made the objections to the then Environment and Heritage Service. It was Jeffrey Donaldson and Edwin Poots, on behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party, who made the objections, who went to see the Environment and Heritage Service, who made the case for it —

Mr Elliott: Why did you not make the case when you were the Minister?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor. Every other Member who wanted the opportunity to speak in the debate got that opportunity. Members should not shout from a sedentary position.

Mr Poots: I do not really mind the flak, Mr Speaker, because, when you throw a dog into a pack of hounds, the ones that yelp the loudest are the ones that are hurt the most. The fact of life is that, of the parties to my right, neither the TUV — I do not know whether I should describe it as a party, because it is a single person — nor the Ulster Unionist Party voiced one smidgeon of opposition to the listing of those buildings at that time. They want to close the door after the horse has bolted. You are being shown up as the hypocrites that you are. The work that was done —

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order to use language that ascribes to Members the term "hypocrites"?

Mr Speaker: I ask all Members to moderate their language, please, especially in the Chamber.

Mr Poots: I was referring to the parties, but I see that some people are very touchy. They do not like being faced with robust debate; they just like to be robust in their comments when they do not have the opportunity for a response.

It was made very clear during negotiations and in the report that the site would be a neutral, inclusive and constructive place. None of that relates to a shrine. Northern Ireland went

through a dreadful period for many years. The Maze is one of the greatest reflections of why we should never go back to that. Thousands of years of people's lives were lost in that prison. Thousands of lives were lost as a consequence of the actions of people who ended up in that prison. There is something there to tell the rest of the world, and an opportunity to encourage people from across the world that, here in Northern Ireland, we have moved on and moved forward. We can point to what has happened and to the Maze as a symbol of everything that was wrong in Northern Ireland. We can step forward from that, leave it behind, and encourage and incentivise others who may be considering going down the route that Northern Ireland did to desist and resist for their own well-being.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The usual roles in the Chamber have been taken during the debate, but I see this as an opportunity to move the process along. It is perhaps strange that the Ulster Unionists proposed the motion. It did not come through the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which visited the site on a couple of occasions. Hopefully, the debate will encourage the regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh site, and we will see movement on the setting up of the corporate body to move things along.

As for the idea of a shrine or there being a romantic attraction to the site, having visited it several times, with families on many occasions, I see no romantic attraction to the Maze/ Long Kesh. It is certainly nothing for anyone to look back on with pride, from either those who worked in it or those who were prisoners there. It was a harsh time and it is a harsh site, and there is no romanticism to it. It was a time that, hopefully, we will never return to. If the buildings do anything, they remind people of the harsh reality of what the conflict was about and how it affected so many people's lives over the years.

Another reminder is the World War II site, because the aircraft hangars are there. The Committee visited the Ulster Aviation Society museum at the site. That is another part of the site that can be developed. It reminds people of the traumas of the world wars. Again, there is no romanticism about that.

There is an opportunity to recognise conflict in various forms, to bring it into perspective, to recognise it, and to recognise some of the achievements of that time. The conflict resolution centre is an opportunity for victims from all sides to tell their stories: from the point of view of prison officers, prisoners, relatives who visited the site, and those who went through traumas in various ways, such as children who visited parents and people who had to trek up and down the road to it.

That is the past, and now is an opportunity in the development of the Long Kesh site to look to and build for the future. There is an opportunity to develop the site and to create a new future and a new beginning for people. It is a massive site — 350 acres — and if it were being handed to anyone at a time of severe economic decline with an opportunity to build on it, they should grasp it with both hands.

We have an opportunity to create a corporate body, which will develop the site and bring economic prosperity to regenerate it and to create opportunities. As far as I understand it, the RUAS is ready and willing to move to the site and expand its remit on it. That will attract other businesses, shows and developments to the site.

The site is ideally situated, in close proximity to the motorway, railway and airport. Therefore, it is an ideal location for development. We should not miss this opportunity and we should not allow it to drag on any further. We need to get the corporate body set up, start putting plans in place and start delivering on people's vision for the site. Let us not dwell continuously on the past. I am not saying that we should ignore the past or forget it, but we should move on to try to create a better future for the victims of the past. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr T Clarke: It is probably timely that I follow on from the previous Member to speak because I think that he was the first Member to have included the other people who can tell their stories. I am happy to put on record that when the idea was first mooted, I was concerned because the whole emphasis was that the site would be a shrine and that others would never be included in the proposals. However, as the proposals expanded, provision for others to tell their stories was included.

At the start, when the idea grew legs, there was concern from some people in the unionist population that the site would be a shrine, but I thank the First Minister and deputy First

Minister and their good offices for including the stories that we are now going to tell for the RUC, the army, prison staff, civilians and the Fire Service. There was a fear that those would not be told, but I am glad that that issue has been addressed. It has allayed my fears.

Another very important issue, which has been touched on today, is that victims are going to get the opportunity to tell their stories. We should never forget the victims. There were prisoners only because there were victims in the first place. The prisoners created the victims, and, equally, the victims should have an opportunity to tell their stories.

As the previous Member who spoke said, we look at the economic climate today and at the size and scale of the site. We have a 350-acre site, and we have an opportunity. Many of us are being lobbied about construction jobs and roads. Indeed, there seems to be an emphasis on it, and many of us received letters today in relation to the A5 to try to encourage more investment in Northern Ireland. We have an excellent opportunity here for a multimillion pound investment. We need to redevelop the site and, therefore, I welcome it from that point of view.

There is also the tourism potential of the site. We should never take away from the opportunity to create a vast array of things there in the future. The other thing that gives me the greatest confidence is that we are not handing the site over to someone to do what they wish with it. OFMDFM will always have full control over the conflict transformation centre. While we have a devolved institution in Northern Ireland, that gives me confidence, and I hope that it will give the wider public confidence that the site will not be left to someone to do as they wish with it; it will be up to the democratic process in the Assembly.

To touch again on the conflict transformation centre, I said that I was sceptical about it at the start, given the troubled past that, unfortunately, we have had in Northern Ireland. However, when I got married 21 years ago, I went to Jersey for my honeymoon, and I remember paying to visit a German underground hospital. Therefore, people in other areas have had the foresight to use what is there to tell a story. There are also other opportunities.

Hopefully, I am spared for many days, and that my family goes on to have a family. I look forward to the day when I can take my grandchildren to the prison and show them what, hopefully, at that stage will still be behind us. I will be able to show them the conditions in which prisoners lived and where some people chose to starve themselves to death for a greater cause.

I can show them where some prisoners decided to go on dirty protests and blanket protests and to live in their own excrement but then moved on and stayed to work under British rule. That says a lot about how we have moved on.

That is our troubled past, and those people brought violence to the streets at the time. However, I must put it on record that it is good to see that people have decided to choose the democratic process as the way forward for Northern Ireland. If that is all part of our history, we must tell that history. I support both our amendment and the SDLP amendment.

12.00 noon

Mr Nesbitt: I am sure that some of the language and invective that we have heard to date will be of great comfort to the victims and survivors of our Troubles.

I will speak first of an experience that I had as a victims' commissioner, when I was invited by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to a meeting of interested bodies or stakeholders, if you prefer that word. The meeting was called in the headquarters of the Community Relations Council in Belfast. It was well attended, and the SIB said that it wanted us to focus on three questions that afternoon. The first question was: "In principle, is it a good idea to have a conflict transformation centre?". The second was: "If the answer to the above is yes, what should it look like and what should be in it?". The third was: "Where should it be located?". For the next three hours, we had a lively and, at times, heated debate not on the first or second question but solely on the third question.

Much like in football, where there is an ABU — Anyone But United — when it comes to a conflict transformation centre, there is an ABM: Anywhere But the Maze prison. For some, it is the scene of resistance; for others, it is the scene of the crime. Unless we resolve that, we will be making a mistake. Even though we may have agreed it in the past, it is not too late to change our minds.

On the principle of whether we should have a conflict transformation centre, the Ulster Unionists are clear: we are in favour of it. We have a victims' charter, and, on question one, although we resist having a conflict transformation centre at the Maze, we are very open to having one. On the second question, about the centre's content, our view is that it should reflect the lack of agreement about everything to do with our conflict.

Mr McCartney: Will the Member enlighten us about his opinion at that meeting as a victims' commissioner representing all victims?

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

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention. Perhaps I should have made it clear that I went there to observe the debate and report back to my three colleagues. When the Victims' Commission was established, although everyone who applied to be commissioner had applied to be the single commissioner, the resolution was to appoint four co-equals as commissioners. Therefore, in business terms, you effectively have an organisation with four co-equal chairs. No one has a casting vote, and no one's opinion is more important than anyone else's. Therefore, it would be impossible to go to a public meeting, such as that stakeholder meeting run by the SIB, and offer an opinion without first reporting back and consulting your three colleagues. So, I offered no opinion.

As for the content of a conflict resolution centre, we need one central repository where, as Ms Ruane said, every view can be reflected. We do not agree on anything about our conflict. We do not agree on what happened. We do not agree on why it happened. We do not agree on the language that we use to describe it. We do not even agree on when it began: 40 years ago, 400 years ago, 900 years ago — take your pick.

It is critical that, if we have a conflict resolution centre, we have one central repository. If my colleagues to my left are so tuned into victims, they will know that, if you put it at the Maze, there will not be one central repository. Some groups will split off and do their own thing, and we will lose the value of having a central repository as a conflict resolution centre.

As well as content, we need to think about resource. If we are serious about building peace, we have to look at the fact that we have an uneven playing field. On one side of the fence there are some very good advocates, such as the Pat Finucane Centre, which is reported as doing very good work in helping victims and survivors, for example, in engagement with the Historical Enquiries Team. There is no equivalent on the other side of the fence. If we are to put resource into conflict resolution and peace-building, we must consider giving resource to the likes of Justice for Innocent Victims of the Troubles, bodies that are trying to build up that expertise in advocacy for people from the Protestant, unionist and loyalist community.

I cannot support the SDLP's amendment. It states that the centre:

> *"must have due regard to the needs of victims and survivors".*

The biggest mistake you can make in looking at victims and survivors is to view them as a homogenous group who all think the same way and have the same needs. They do not. For many years now, I have been helping somebody — I believe he is a member of the Democratic Unionist Party — who worked in the Maze prison. He policed a riot for three days and took a stroke. He has not had a stroke since but has never been classified as a victim. The medical evidence at the time said that stress did not invoke a stroke. Medical opinion today is divided. Why is he not a victim?

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

Mr Nesbitt: I will close by saying that I support the development of the Maze site, the development of the former army bases and the development of a peace-building centre, but I do not support its establishment at the Maze.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an dá leasú agus in éadan an rúin. I will speak in favour of both amendments and against the motion.

It has already been pointed out — to date, I have not heard the Ulster Unionist Party explain why it has changed its opinion on the siting of a transformation centre at the Long Kesh site — that the first panel set up to examine how the site should be used was chaired by David Campbell. Edwin Poots has already said that part of signing off on that particular document was that the four parties represented all had to give their blessing at that time. David Campbell

was the chair, and he signed off on it. It was a very clear proposal that there would be a conflict transformation centre at the Long Kesh site. Whatever changed your minds — Mike Nesbitt gave some articulation of that in his presentation — I have not heard anything consistent from the Ulster Unionists as to why they changed their minds.

The only thing that has changed in the intervening years is that the balance of power has shifted within unionism. In my opinion, this is a debate that the Ulster Unionist Party has developed as a result of that shift in balance. I say that because the panel that replaced the consultation panel was the development group. One of the criticisms made of the first panel was that the Alliance Party was not represented, but it was given a place on that development group, which was chaired by Edwin Poots. The Ulster Unionist Party refused, within months of the panel producing its first report, to put a person on that development group and did so right throughout its history. Let us have a bit of honesty and integrity when you are talking about why you changed your mind.

It is also interesting — I say this to everybody who has spoken in the debate — to hear other people telling republicans what they want on that site. They always define it in simple, straightforward terms. I declare an interest as a former political prisoner who served time in Long Kesh and as the chair of Coiste, which is the representation body for political ex-prisoners. We made a presentation to David Campbell's committee. It is there on the record for people to read. If people go away and read it, then come back with some of the comments that have been made here this morning about what republicans want to see on that site and that corresponds to what they have said here today, I will stand here and make an apology on behalf of republicans. However, I will not be making any apology, because we stated very clearly that what we wanted on the site was recognition of its political and historical significance.

Caitríona Ruane said that history is about everyone telling their story: the people who were in the prison; the people who staffed it; the British soldiers on the watchtowers; and the people who visited the prison, such as the Quakers. All those representative groups should be invited to tell their story. Indeed, victims of the conflict in the North should also be allowed to tell their story. That is what republicans want — nothing more, nothing less. That is what Members should address today instead of pretending that republicans want something else when it is not there to be seen or examined. That is very important.

What else do we want for the site? From the beginning, we have always said that the site should be developed to its maximum potential. I was a member of the development group and read some of the papers from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Almost every developer or observer who has gone to that site said that it would be foolish to develop it without some recognition of its political and historical significance. There is no controversy about the Crumlin Road prison, Portlaoise prison, Kilmainham jail, Armagh prison or Downpatrick prison. There is a focus, sometimes falsely created, particularly by unionists, on the Long Kesh site. The Long Kesh site existed; it has a history and a political significance.

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

Mr McCartney: In my opinion, the only way to develop the site properly is to recognise that political and historical significance.

Mr Weir: We have had a wide-ranging debate, and, indeed, some strange things have been said. I was particularly taken by Mike Nesbitt's attack on the victims' sector in the unionist community. He said that that none was of any worth compared with the Pat Finucane Centre. When the Member reflects on what he said, having read Hansard, he may well have cause to regret it. Furthermore, the Member does not see the inherent contradiction in saying initially that what unites victims and survivors is the belief that the Maze is the wrong place, but later, when dealing with the SDLP amendment, saying that there is no particular view among victims and survivors and they should not be lumped together. For someone who is, supposedly, the great defender of victims to reject an amendment that talks about having due regard for the needs of victims and survivors seems to be rank hypocrisy, but we have seen that all too frequently from the Ulster Unionist Party in this debate. I will come to that in a moment.

Everyone agrees that work needs to be done on the site. We are in the deepest recession for many years, and the overall scheme for the development of the Maze needs to move ahead.

It can provide employment and finance for all our people, which is something to be welcomed and embraced. Previous false starts were mentioned, the obvious one being the national stadium. However, I want to make it clear that I have always had concerns about that, although less about its location and more about whether we could marry all three sports in one stadium. Ultimately, it fell because the economic case did not stack up, and the decision was made on economic grounds. Nevertheless, we put that behind us, and, on the sporting side, we support stadiums and look to move the Maze situation forward.

I will now come to the hub of the motion and the Ulster Unionist Party's concerns. At that party's conference, David Campbell, who is not merely a minor member of that party but its chairman, said that we should remember the role of the Ulster Unionist Party, particularly during the peace process. He said that the party had not been given credit for all that it had done. I agree with David Campbell: let us remember its role. Let us specifically remember the role of Mr Campbell, who chaired the Maze consultation panel before Mr Poots, and, indeed, was intimately involved in the matter. It beggars belief that the Ulster Unionists would raise concerns at this stage, when their fingerprints are all over the proposal. If the remarks of Mr Campbell, who is a former Member for Lagan Valley, had been made by someone who would be regarded as a bit more of a loose cannon, such as that party's current Member for Lagan Valley, one could understand the Ulster Unionist Party trying to distance itself from those remarks. However, the reality is that those remarks were made by its current chairman.

12.15 pm

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for giving way. Mr Nesbitt is a johnny-come-lately to the Ulster Unionist Party. He had no position a number of years ago, and, before that, he recognised that the Ulster Unionist Party supported the proposal. However, he now says that that was wrong. Does the Member see the obvious conflict between the position of the party chairman and that of one of its new boys in the Assembly?

Indeed, there has been abuse of victims where this issue is concerned. The proposal is not about setting up something for prisoners to celebrate; it is about setting up something to fight the fight for peace in the future and to demonstrate what was wrong with Northern Ireland society. It is not about demonstrating that violence was good.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I remind Members about long interventions.

Mr Weir: I could not agree more with the Member. Indeed, if there is to be conflict resolution, perhaps it should start between Mr Nesbitt and Mr Campbell. That may be the most appropriate use of it.

We agree with the SDLP amendment, which effectively subsumes ours. Victims and survivors should be put at the heart of the proposal. In many ways, the Maze is the ideal place for a proposal such as this. We will ensure that there is nothing that glorifies terrorism. Additionally, we need something that reminds us of the bad days and of the evil that people should be warned not to go back to. It is therefore important that there is something that meets that need.

The synthetic concern that the Ulster Unionist Party has produced at this stage does not put victims and survivors at the heart of the proposal. If it is to show proper commitment to victims and survivors, let it join us in the Lobbies supporting the SDLP amendment. Let us speak with one voice in protecting victims and survivors, rather than, like the Ulster Unionist Party, showing false concern about proposals of which it is the genesis. Let us remember the greatest contribution that the Ulster Unionist Party made to the Maze: that was in 1998, when it threw open the prison gates and —

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

Mr Weir: — let out terrorist prisoners. We will not take lectures from the party to my right on anything that has happened at the Maze.

Mr Allister: A few weeks ago in the 'News Letter' there was a front-page report of a speech that the First Minister made in, I think, Liverpool. The headline was something like: "We can't push Sinn Féin too far".

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I note that that matter is with my legal team because of the inaccuracy of the headline, so it should not be repeated.

Mr Speaker: I remind the whole House, especially the Member who has the Floor, to be very mindful of what is being said.

Mr Allister: Obviously, that is news to me. I take cognisance of it.

The issue that I start with is that the huge transformation that we have seen in the DUP position is, of course, driven by a philosophy that says, "We must keep Sinn Féin happy if we are to keep our jobs". A few years ago, the stadium proposition was utterly rejected because it was tainted by the ugly buildings that made up the prison at the Maze and by the fear that they would become a shrine that would brand and taint the entire proposition. The stadium was rejected by many on that basis. Today, however, we have reached the point where not only can the DUP accept the buildings remaining —

Mr Givan: You accepted them.

Mr Allister: I never did.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: It accepts that the buildings can not only remain but be an integral part of the proposition.

If branding and blighting was an issue for the stadium, how much more is it, inevitably, an issue for the conflict resolution centre? If we need a conflict resolution centre, why do we need to put it somewhere where it will be blighted and branded? The answer, of course, is that Sinn Féin will not support it anywhere else. That is why, in the rolling over to the Sinn Féin demand, we have the scenario that it will be agreed that it will be at the Maze. Therefore, it will incorporate the very buildings that will be the shrine and which caused the deputy leader of the DUP to rightly say, "However it is dressed up," — my oh my, it has been well dressed up today — "whatever spin is deployed," — the spin that has been deployed today has been dizzying:

> *"the preservation of a section of the H-Blocks — including the hospital wing — would become a shrine to the terrorists who committed suicide in the Maze in the 1980s. That would be obnoxious to the vast majority of people and is something unionist people cannot accept."*

Nigel Dodds was right then, and he is right now. The Members whose deputy leader he is must, inevitably, be saying that he is wrong. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: I agreed with him entirely when he said that. Was Nigel Dodds wrong? Is he wrong, or was he right? Members on the DUP Benches know in their heart that he was right. Yet, as in so much, for the sake of accepting what Sinn Féin demands, they are prepared to roll over on the issue and to blight and brand a worthwhile project of development at the Maze with this, because they are anticipating the utterly unnecessary retention of the buildings. Three DUP Environment Ministers could have delisted those buildings, had them demolished and neutralised the site. Instead, they kept it contaminated, and keeping it contaminated brands the proposition for a conflict resolution centre and destroys the worth that is in that proposition. If there is a need for one, why does it have to be at the Maze?

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member agree that, given that we have come out of a period of deep violence and conflict, there is a need for some sort of mechanism in our society and some sort of site that can bring about a lasting peace and build confidence and reconciliation in our community? I know that the Member objects to the site at Maze/Long Kesh, but does he accept the concept?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Allister: Thank you. I am open to persuasion on the concept of a conflict resolution centre, if that is what it genuinely is and not some mechanism for the rewriting of history. That is why I ask this question: why brand it, why blight it and why damn it by associating it with something that will never deliver the neutrality and the objectivity —

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

Mr Allister: — that, otherwise, should and would be required? I support the motion and reject the amendments.

Mr P Robinson: Given that I speak following the remarks of the Member for North Antrim, I will comment on some of his remarks before I come to the substance of the motion.

As I look across the Chamber, the picture that comes into my mind is that of a certain Japanese man. That is not a racist comment, nor is it any reference to the appearance of the Member for North Antrim. I think his name was Hiroo Onoda. He was sent to a Philippine island during the last war to carry out certain acts to disrupt the allies. He stayed in the jungle even after the war was over. Even though they went round the island with loudspeakers to tell him that the war was over, he would not believe it. Even though they dropped leaflets on him, he would not believe it. Twenty-nine years after the war was over, he came out. It seems to me that the Member for North Antrim still has not come to terms with the fact that we have left behind the era in which he seems to be content to mire himself. We are in a new era, trying to move forward.

The Member tries to style himself as the official opposition in the Assembly. He is not an opposition at all in this Assembly; he is the opposition to this Assembly. That is a distinct difference. He is opposed to these structures. He wants to bring them down. He takes on the role of wrecker in this Assembly, and we would be very foolish if we were to pay too much heed to his words or tactics.

The motion is constructed in three parts, as the Member for Lagan Valley suggested. I readily join its proposer in acknowledging the potential social and economic benefits that the development of former military sites across Northern Ireland can bring. More than that, the Executive are actively involved in extracting the full potential from each of those sites. Nowhere is that potential greater than at the Maze site. It is roughly twice the size of the Titanic Quarter, and its strategic location on a number of arterial routes makes the M/LK site a potential catalyst for economic recovery in Northern Ireland. We are determined to ensure that we maximise the potential of that significant site. It not only provides opportunities to bring local social and economic regeneration but can create something of regional and, I believe, national significance. Out of the prison site that in the past was a manifestation of individual, organisational and even societal failure, we want to achieve something new that demonstrates our desire to build a brighter, better and shared future for all.

Nor do I have any resistance to the part of the motion that seeks to see the site developed in a manner that is sensitive to the feelings of victims. The centre will build on the evolving cohesion, sharing and integration policy agenda and contribute to dealing with the legacy of the past, not least in supporting the victims and survivors who suffered during the years of conflict. Its international dimension will help to embed our region more deeply in worldwide peace-building networks. What better outward symbol could there be of our society's transition to stability and peace? We fully recognise the long-term impact of violence. Victims and survivors are individuals, and, as the Member for Strangford indicated, no single approach will suit them all. I can, however, categorically assure Members that every effort will be made to ensure that the functions and remit of the centre will not be offensive to those who have suffered.

It is the third element of the Ulster Unionist Party motion, which speaks of their concern about the proposal to build this centre at the Maze site, that I find not only interesting but, perhaps, bemusing. I am at a loss to understand the rationale and intention of the Ulster Unionist Party at expressing such concerns, unless, of course, they are repenting. My difficulty in understanding their so-called concern and, indeed, the reference on Saturday at the Ulster Unionist Party conference by the leader to a terrorist shrine at the Maze comes from the fact that the proposal that concerns them is their own proposal. It was not a DUP First Minister and Sinn Féin deputy First Minister who advanced the proposal for a peace-building and conflict resolution centre: we inherited it. The leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and then First Minister and an SDLP deputy First Minister nominated the chairman and vice-chairman of the panel that brought forward the proposal. The leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and then First Minister agreed to the outcome of the panel's report and endorsed it.

12.30 pm

It might be worthwhile to look at some elements of the Ulster Unionist Party-led report. It says:

> *"The ICCT will include the World War 2 structures; one H block; the prison hospital; the administration building and emergency control room; a prison chapel; a section of the prison perimeter wall around Maze cellular; a watchtower; and a cage from Maze compound."*

It was the Ulster Unionist Party-led panel that recommended that the Maze be the site. It was the Ulster Unionist Party-led panel

that recommended that there should be an international conflict transformation centre at the Maze. It was the Ulster Unionist Party-led panel that suggested that the listed buildings should be part of that overall centre.

The report goes further:

> *"the work of the International Centre could be facilitated positively by being located beside the preserved buildings. Since part of the purpose of the Centre would be to acknowledge and learn from the past whilst looking forward to and building for the future, it would be fitting to do so in a setting which played a major role in the conflict."*

It continues:

> *"The Panel recommend that the government should protect the structures associated with the International Centre and provide funding to ensure the buildings do not fall into decay … We believe these structures should be given statutory protection and recommend that the Government concludes the formal process of listing as soon as possible."*

The very listing of the structures at the Maze comes from the Ulster Unionist Party-led panel. This is not the proposal of the Democratic Unionist Party or, indeed, of Sinn Féin; it is the baby of the Ulster Unionist Party that it is now trying to drown and distance itself from.

My colleagues from Lagan Valley made exceptional speeches and indicated their support. Indeed, I note that the brief history outlined by one Member — he only had time to do it briefly — is such that I gauge that most people in our society would be happy to go along to such a facility to see the history of the army and the prison officers who worked in the Maze. There will be many levels of interest in that site, and I am absolutely determined that there will be no terrorist shrine in the Maze. If it was ever the proposal of the Ulster Unionist Party to have a terrorist shrine — it was that party's proposal — it will be stopped when it comes to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. That is not just my point of view: when questioned during First Minister and deputy First Minister's Question Time and when pressed time and time again by Members from the Ulster Unionist Party, the deputy First Minister has repeated over and over again that he has no intention of allowing the site to become a shrine for terrorism.

The leader of Ulster Unionist Party said at his party conference on Saturday:

> *"We didn't bring forward proposals for a terrorist shrine at the former Maze prison site."*

If he considers it to be a terrorist shrine, he has to accept that his party brought forward those proposals. It ill becomes him now to arrive in the Chamber and attempt to milk whatever latent form of opposition there might be to a conflict resolution centre at the Maze to see if he can get on that bandwagon. There are few bandwagons left for him to get on.

The Ulster Unionist Party does not come to this debate today with clean hands. The proposals have been approved by the leadership of that party and brought forward by the present chairman of the Ulster Unionist Party, who, incidentally, was sitting on the platform while the Ulster Unionist Party leader attacked him for having brought forward proposals in the meantime. I happen to agree with the Member for North Down: we should allow the Ulster Unionist Party to go down there for a free week when the facility is open so that they can try to resolve the conflict that there clearly is within their party.

The Member indicated that it was not the most appropriate site, but the report clearly believes that it is. That report was brought forward by his colleague, his friend, his chairman, Mr David Campbell. He then spoke about the secrecy of the proposal: there is nothing secret about the proposal. The very fact that we are debating it today should indicate that it is far from secret. He mentioned the application. Of course, OFMDFM does not want to jeopardise its application, but we will be happy to sit down and go over the application with him and his deputy chairman, if he wants to bring him along to such a meeting. As far as EU funding is concerned, this is not the pot of money that community groups seek funding from; it is the institutional and structural part of funding. I think that it is measure 2.2 that we are seeking funding from.

The initial overall development focuses on two anchor projects: the proposed peace-building and conflict resolution centre and the anticipated proposal for the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society to create a centre of rural excellence at the site. We hope that those two projects will be a catalyst for attracting further investment and thousands of jobs throughout Northern Ireland. Socio-economic conditions, including the potential employment opportunities that will arise, have been at the

heart of all of the options, analysis and testing undertaken thus far.

I welcome this opportunity to reinforce our intention that the centre that we are building will be a world-class centre of excellence dedicated to promoting and strengthening peace-building processes and non-violent conflict resolution and prevention, both here in Northern Ireland and around the globe. We want to create a world-leading facility that will provide opportunities for academic research, conferences, educational activity and events examining conflict prevention, resolution and social cohesion issues.

The centre will build on Northern Ireland's experience, helping to contribute positively to creating a more stable and peaceful world. There is potential for the venue to accommodate temporary and permanent exhibitions from around the world. The benefits of the peace-building and conflict resolution centre are substantial, and, placed in tandem with our proposals for the potential relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society at Maze/Long Kesh, we believe that we are providing the impetus required to attract further investment to the site. Invest Northern Ireland has already recognised that the work of the centre will enhance our regional and international reputation and that this will encourage external investment. The potential for this is significant and could result in the creation of thousands of jobs.

The deputy First Minister and I will retain accountability for the role and functions of the centre, and we are accountable to the House, thereby ensuring that it is used solely for the purposes intended. We believe that, through partnership, the centre will draw together and build on the work of existing local and regional organisations. The outcome of this collective approach will be far more challenging and delivery-focused as a result. I am in no doubt that this will lead to the positive resolution of difficult issues experienced by many victims and survivors of conflict. Let Members stop trying to stir up anxiety and disquiet about this important, beneficial scheme, and put our collective weight behind what can be a truly significant regional development.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business for Members when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.39 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 10 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

DE Capital Projects: South Antrim

1. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Education what capital projects his Department has planned for South Antrim over the next three years.
(AQO 632/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At this point, I am not in a position to detail what new capital projects are planned in South Antrim or any other area. I have made it clear that we need to move to a more strategic approach to planning, and I have commissioned the education and library boards (ELB), working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and other sectors, to undertake that work. I have also indicated that no school capital building project will be looked at in isolation. Projects will be looked at within the context of the wider area plan. Until that work is complete, I cannot comment on individual schools or on specific areas.

The focus of area planning will be to determine the future needs of an area across all sectors and then to compare what is needed with what already exists in order to identify gaps and over-provision. Once the need is determined, the school managing authorities will consider how best to meet that need. The emphasis must be on a network of sustainable schools and maximising the use of the existing estate. Future capital investment will be targeted at supporting area plans.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. However, I have major concerns about a number of areas, one being Parkhall Integrated College in Antrim, which has already had some rationalisation in the secondary-school sector. From a health and safety point of view, the building is probably substandard, with major leaks. This time last year, there was the necessity for movement on that, and the college indicated that it was ready to go to build in October 2010. Unfortunately, that is all in the bye. Another concern is Ballyclare Primary School, which is in need of major health and safety upgrades to make it last. I know that it is on a scheme for replacement in the longer term, but some minor improvement is required to make it abide by current health and safety requirements.

Mr O'Dowd: I understand fine well MLAs raising issues about schools in their constituencies. However, as Minister, I have a responsibility to ensure that we achieve a sustainable schools estate and that we use the very limited public resources available to us in the most effective and efficient way. I believe that setting out the area planning proposal is the best way forward. We can be assured that when the area plans come back, the proposals in them will meet the needs of education in any constituency for at least a generation.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to keep their questions brief.

Mr McLaughlin: I congratulate Paul. I thought that that was an excellent performance.

The Minister made two references to the area planning process, and I assume that that type of best practice should be rolled out across every constituency. Will he tell us when he expects this area planning process to be completed?

Mr O'Dowd: I would like to see the area plans back with me by March 2012. If, for any reason, the boards and CCMS, working in conjunction with the other sectors, have their area plans completed beforehand, I am more than willing to take receipt of them. However, the target date for completion is March 2012.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I would like to think that the clear health and safety issues that the Member opposite referred to will be looked at by the people responsible for those schools.

Is the Minister exploring other potential sources of funding for capital projects in the education sector?

Mr O'Dowd: It was remiss of me not to answer Mr Girvan's question, but he asked so many questions.

The onus is on the managing authority of a school to investigate any health and safety concerns and, where possible, to take remedial action. In the October monitoring round, we were successful in securing a further £10 million towards maintenance costs for schools, and that is very welcome. However, there are significant maintenance costs across our schools estate. Am I looking for alternative sources of funding? Yes, and I am open to suggestions for funding for capital builds moving forward. I think that we have to think outside the box in the current financial climate, and if there are alternative funding sources or funding sources that would complement existing departmental funds, I am willing to take a look at them.

Home-to-school Transport

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Education if he has identified any immediate financial savings which could be effected within the next year by putting home-to-school transport services out to competitive tender. (AQO 633/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have committed the education and library boards to delivering £5 million of savings in the current financial year. The performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) has been commissioned to review efficiency in home-to-school transport services, and it will report with recommendations very soon. That report will identify how to generate further savings going forward.

The context for that report, however, is that the ELBs already put many of their home-to-school transport bus and taxi contracts out to competitive tender to secure cost-effective services than meet the safety standards for school transport. More children are transported by services that are provided under contract to ELBs than are transported by the boards. Approximately 50,000 of the 90,000 children who receive transport assistance do so in the form of a bus pass for appropriate Translink services.

Better competitive tendering, not competitive tendering per se, is the issue. The PEDU report has looked into such occurrences in accordance with its terms of reference. In addition, the boards could improve the efficiency of the services that they provide. The £5 million savings target challenges them on that. The PEDU report will also do so, and, again, that is in accordance with its terms of reference.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. Minister, surely your Department could save money on school transport by involving the private sector and by bundling contracts for school transport across the Province.

Mr O'Dowd: We are open to any area where we can provide savings, as long as those savings deliver an effective and efficient service to the people whom we are here to serve. By and large, the boards go out to competitive tendering. There are a number of cases where boards provide their own buses. That occurs in circumstances, particularly in rural communities, where Translink does not have regular services. In such circumstances, the boards provide a bus. In circumstances where children have a statemented need, with travel by taxi considered to be the best form of transport, a taxi will be provided. Taxis are also used where there is a small cohort of children and bus provision would not be viable. However, by and large, Translink is the main provider, and a number of private providers complement that.

I await the final publication of the PEDU report. I am expecting the draft, which I will publish, to be in my Department within the next number of weeks. No doubt, it will make wide-ranging recommendations, and the Department will be willing to work its way through those as long as they meet the needs of the schools and our school transport service.

During a recent debate in the Chamber, which, I think, the Member's party sponsored, I agreed to carry out a fundamental review of school transport services.

Mr Campbell: The Minister said that Translink is the main provider of such transport but that the private sector offers services in addition to that. If, through the PEDU route, the Department ends up considering further private sector transportation arrangements, how thorough will the checks be to ensure that the bona fide, legitimate operators are able to compete on a contractual basis with those against whom there have been past alleged misdemeanours that, despite investigations by the Department, do not appear to have been uncovered?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not wish to pre-empt the PEDU report and its recommendations. Your second comment related to an open and transparent system for tendering. That will certainly be the case. I expect that to be the case, and I have

no doubt that our boards carry out the tendering process in that manner at this time.

There are a number of measures that boards can, and do, take against transport providers that do not fully follow contracts or the criteria that are stipulated for them. In the cases of minor incidents, providers can be warned that further action will be taken if it happens again. In the most extreme cases, such as a provider not ensuring the health and safety of the young people whom it is transporting, the contract can be taken from the provider and they can be removed from the tendering list. Therefore, sanctions are available, and they have been used in a number of incidences.

If the Member has any specific examples that he wishes to forward to me, I will be happy to ask my officials to investigate them further.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I was going to ask when he expected PEDU to publish its findings, but I think he covered that in his response to Mr Cree's question.

Ethnic Minorities: Barriers to Education

3. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to introduce a strategic framework to remove the barriers to education for people from ethnic minorities.
(AQO 634/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My officials participate in the racial equality panel and racial equality forum, which are working towards a new racial equality strategy through a partnership process with other Departments, minority ethnic groups and the wider community. They will provide a framework to tackle racial inequalities and open up opportunity to all.

My Department will also continue to reflect the needs of ethnic minorities in a range of policies and programmes including 'Every School a Good School – Supporting Newcomer Pupils'. The Department is also considering the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) report on promoting racial equality in post-primary schools.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. What is the Minister's assessment of the pastoral care afforded to children from ethnic minorities? Quite often, children are the only interpreters between teachers and staff, and I wonder what the Minister's assessment is of that level of pastoral care and support in our education system.

Mr O'Dowd: We are lucky to have a very high level of pastoral care across our schools. That comes down to the work of individual schools, the management teams in those schools and the enthusiasm of those involved in the pastoral care schemes.

I was at the launch of the NICEM report, and, having listened to the views expressed there, I am of the view that there are lessons to be learned about issues of racial equality. I am considering the NICEM report on the experiences of ethnic minorities in our schools, and I will report back on that in due course. However, in general, I feel that our schools have a very good pastoral care system, which is driven by the schools, the teachers and the staff.

Mr McNarry: Will the Minister join me in welcoming the passage of the Armed Forces Bill through Parliament last week, which guarantees the removal of any barriers to education for service families throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr O'Dowd: I fail to see the relevance to the original question.

Mr McNarry: You are the Minister; you should see it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Ms Lo: I am sure that my supplementary question will be relevant.

Minister, I welcome the fact that you are looking at NICEM's report and the racial equality strategy. However, will you consider a more holistic approach, particularly towards Roma families? Those families have a very restricted immigration status and no right to seek employment or any welfare entitlement, yet there is a statutory entitlement on them to send their children to school. When they do not have —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Ms Lo: I have already asked a question — *[Laughter.]* Those families do not receive assistance for school uniforms, transport or school meals.

Mr O'Dowd: Following the rather disturbing incidents in Belfast last year, or perhaps the year before, in which the Roma community

came under attack, my predecessor, Caitríona Ruane, introduced support for that community. Indeed, from a very limited budget, she made substantial amounts of money available to the Belfast Education and Library Board, which covers the area where the vast majority of our Roma population appear to live. A total of £2,000 per child is available to support Roma children through our education system.

You are quite correct that the Roma immigration status causes barriers and difficulties. However, I believe that my predecessor acted appropriately at that time. That support network still exists, and I hope to be able to continue it into the future.

DE Circular 1979/10: 'Greater Involvement of Young People in the Youth Service'

4. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education to explain the rationale behind the decision to rescind circular 1979/10 'The Greater Involvement of Young People in Northern Ireland'.
(AQO 635/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Circular 1979/10, which is actually entitled 'Greater Involvement of Young People in the Youth Service', was issued in February 1979 to create a system for participation in the Youth Service.

In advance of the new policy on youth, officials reviewed the relevance of the circular and determined that it did not reflect the policy and legislative changes in youth work in the intervening 32 years; that it did not reflect the emergence and further development of a youth work curriculum in the past 32 years; and that it did not reflect the methods through which young people might choose to participate now. Officials also found that the circular was not consistent with the funding schemes developed for youth work or with the need for fairness, openness and transparency in the awarding of grants; that it pre-dated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and was not rights-based; and that it has become obsolete, and, therefore, does not direct the participation of young people in the Youth Service today.

2.15 pm

I want to ensure that the service delivery supports for young people are efficient, effective and fit for the 21st century. It is not defensible to continue with outdated structural and funding arrangements that result in an organisation receiving over £1,000 per annum without competition. A review of the circular was overdue. Other organisations in the youth network must apply for scarce resources and demonstrate efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. It would be inequitable to allow one organisation to remain outside published funding schemes.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Education Minister for his response. The circular provided for a regional youth-led body, currently the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, to facilitate youth participation in policy development at community and regional levels, with direct engagement with the Minister and the Department. Will any new policy maintain that level of youth participation in policy development?

Mr O'Dowd: The Youth Forum continues to have direct involvement in youth policy. Indeed, it continues to represent young people in various Department of Education fora, such as the Youth Service Liaison Forum and the Priorities for Youth stakeholder group. I am reviewing youth provision. I want to ensure that the limited funds that we have are properly used. I want to ensure that youth work is connected very closely to — indeed, is one with — education provision and that it meets the needs of our curriculum and delivers a modern education service. As part of that, I will continue to look at the role of the Youth Forum. However, I believe that the circular was outdated, as I said. I have given several reasons for that. We can continue to debate the outdated circular and miss the opportunity to move forward, but I would much prefer to debate the future with the Youth Forum and other youth providers than debate an outdated circular.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister share my concern that officials withdrew the circular without consulting adequately with the stakeholder community? Does he not accept that, in the light of his review of youth services, it would have been better to await the outcome of that review before withdrawing any circular without consultation?

Mr O'Dowd: The removal of the circular was an administrative matter that did not require public consultation. As an elected representative and as Minister, I signed off on the agreement to remove the circular. I believed that that was the right decision then, and I still believe that it is the right decision. When something is so

glaringly out of date, you do not require a review to make a decision.

Let me repeat some of the difficulties with the circular. It did not reflect the methods by which young people may choose to participate now, and it was not consistent with the funding scheme developed for youth work or the need for fairness, openness and transparency in the awarding of grants. I am sure that the Member will agree with me — this is a matter of major concern — that it predated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and was not rights-based.

We can argue about what the circular did or did not provide, but I would much prefer to start the engagement on moving forward and on ensuring that the Youth Service is modern, efficient and effective.

Mr Agnew: I appreciate that the Minister has said that he is holding a review. Can he outline what will be put in as an alternative? The circular seems to have been withdrawn without an alternative in place. In that respect, I see its withdrawal as premature.

Mr O'Dowd: Our youth engage with decision-makers in many ways. We have youth councils. We have a number of examples of school councils. We have direct engagement through Assembly Members and councillors. We have numerous engagements. Access to me and my Department continues. The Youth Forum sits on a number of decision-making bodies. My concern — I believe that it is correct — is that the circular was outdated, given changes in legislation and in the policy direction of the Department over almost three decades. The core of the circular and concerns about it seems to be that the Youth Forum had access to automatic funding. In a time of restricted budgets, we pose difficult questions and have to make difficult decisions about the future provision of education and youth services. That means that no group, and I mean no group, should have automatic entitlement to funding. Groups should be able to present an effective business case and business plan on each occasion to ensure that their programme of work meets the needs of the young people whom they are there to serve.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister assure us that the withdrawal of the circular will not diminish the Youth Forum's ability to continue its valuable work?

Mr O'Dowd: No, it will not. As I stated, the Youth Forum is still engaged in stakeholder groups. It is still engaged in forums, such as the Youth Service Liaison Forum and the Priorities for Youth stakeholder group. Therefore, it remains an active organisation. How active it will be in the future is a matter for the Youth Forum and will depend on the business plans or programmes of work that it brings to funders. I hope that the Youth Forum continues to be an effective and efficient voice for young people, but that is a matter solely for itself.

Redburn Primary School, Holywood

5. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the proposed closure of Redburn Primary School, Holywood.

(AQO 636/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board is assessing the future status of the school as part of its routine process of reviewing the controlled estate. Any significant change to the school estate, such as closure or amalgamation, requires the publication of a statutory development proposal to support that intent. In conjunction with the board of governors of individual schools, the school managing authority brings development proposals for school closures to the Department. In the case of Redburn Primary School, the authority is the South Eastern Education and Library Board. There is, however, no development proposal with my Department for the closure of Redburn Primary School. Ultimately, I decide on development proposals, having considered the factors involved and comments received. On that basis, it would not be appropriate for me to speculate on any possible future decision on Redburn Primary School.

Mr Easton: Will the Minister outline what the possible impacts will be on the school provision for Holywood if the proposed closure goes ahead? In particular, what will be the impact on the army children who attend the school? In light of his announcement of the review of the school estate, does he not feel that it is rather premature and foolish of the commissioners to go ahead with the consultation on the closure?

Mr O'Dowd: As I said in my original answer, I will not speculate on individual schools, particularly because the development proposal is a legal framework. As the adjudicator in that legal framework, it would be wrong of me to speculate

on a decision before considering all the information that is to be placed in front of me. I have not called a pause or stop to any of the education boards moving forward and dealing with development proposals; in fact, I have encouraged boards to speed up that process.

When boards identify schools that are suffering stress or facing major challenges, it is quite right and proper that they continue with the processes outlined in legislation to move those cases forward. I will assess any development proposal that reaches my desk on the basis of the information contained therein. During the two months in which a development proposal is with my Department, I am open to receiving delegations and discussing the matter with elected representatives or representatives of the school. That is when I meet and discuss development proposals in detail and make a decision based on all the information before me.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister continue to make decisions on new applications that are with him for new nursery schools, including for Waringstown in our constituency, or have they been frozen?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I leave it up to the Minister whether he wishes to answer.

Mr O'Dowd: Again, I will not comment on the individual development proposal, because it has not reached my desk. However, the Department of Education faces significant financial pressures, particularly on its front line schools' budget. Every time that I approve a development proposal for a statutory nursery school, it creates extra pressure on the front line schools' budget programme. I am examining the preschool review, which was commissioned before the summer, and is, in my opinion, a good piece of work. It has brought forward a number of proposals on the future of development proposals for turning voluntary and community schools into statutory schools. I will examine those proposals and report back to the Assembly in due course. As I understand it, I am legally bound to make a decision on any development proposal that is currently in the system. I will base my decisions on the merits of each case.

I have to say to the Assembly that the difficulties facing the education budget are severe. Every time that I turn a community and voluntary nursery into a statutory nursery, I am only adding pressure to front line school budgets. Any decision on development proposals has to be taken in the round.

Mr McKay: Does the Minister agree that the ongoing speculation about the future of a number of schools, which we have heard about in the Chamber and the media, that is taking place in advance of development proposals being submitted not only is unhelpful but can damage schools?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes. Speculating on the future of individual schools, be it in the media or in this Chamber, is unhelpful and only heightens concern in communities. I would much prefer to see an informed debate about each school. I think that Members have a duty to inform themselves of the detail of each school. That information is available to them from a wide range of sources and, indeed, through this body. Members can submit questions for written or oral answer. I much prefer them in written form, because I do not think that debating the future of individual schools on the Floor of the Chamber does the schools concerned any good.

I have to say this: at the core of all schools are the pupils. As I have said in the Chamber before, we should not be fixated on buildings but on the young people who are supposed to be being educated in them. That is my core responsibility and that of this debating Chamber.

Schools: Area Planning

6. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Education how he proposes to deal with area planning for schools which are on the borders of education and library board areas and which draw pupils from across board boundaries. (AQO 637/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The focus of area planning will be to determine the future needs of an area across all sectors and then to compare what is needed with what already exists to identify gaps and over-provision. Where boundaries are drawn for planning purposes there will be schools close to boundaries, and they will attract pupils from adjoining areas. Area plans must recognise that reality and plan for the number of pupils who attend schools in the area, whether or not they live in that area. Account must be taken of schools that are situated close to area boundaries, so that the overall number of places planned for matches the projected need and that pupils are not counted twice or omitted from consideration altogether.

In taking forward area planning, education and library boards, working in close conjunction with CCMS and the other sectors, will be required to demonstrate clearly that they have taken account of cross-boundary movement of pupils when they are developing area plans.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Education Minister for his answer. I know that area planning is quite high on his agenda. I was just wondering whether he is planning to do that on all-Northern Ireland basis, as opposed to carrying it out in each education and library board area and having the CCMS as a separate unit. However, maybe he is afraid to take on the CCMS on this proposal.

Mr O'Dowd: I do not think it is a case of my having to take on any of our managing authorities. Our managing authorities are, in some ways, ahead of the game. During the discussion around the previous question, we heard about how education boards are moving forward with difficult but, in my view, necessary decisions. It is not a case of my having to take on CCMS or the boards. However, if I have to take them on, I will, because I believe that the programme of work that I have set out is the right way forward.

Boards plan their provision almost according to council areas. I believe and am, indeed, confident that boards can plan across boundaries in the North. There is an argument for all-Ireland or cross-border planning for some of our schools estate. However, that will take a wee bit longer, because we need further information on how we would do it. I am confident that the education and library boards and CCMS can work not only together but across boundaries.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up for questions to the Minister of Education. We must move on.

Finance and Personnel

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 1 and 7 have been withdrawn, and written responses are required. Questions 3 and 11 have been transferred.

2.30 pm

Rates: Business Premises

2. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the revaluation of business premises will have on the proposal to increase rates on premises with a rateable value of over £500,000. (AQO 648/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Member will recall that I postponed the business rates revaluation that was due to take place in 2011-12. The first reason for doing so was because volatility in the property market at that time caused problems in getting stability for the rate base. Therefore, the revaluation has been put off until 2015, when we hope that balance and equity will be restored to the rates system.

The proposals that I am considering for higher-value shops to fund the enlargement of the small business rates relief scheme are a temporary rebalancing measure because there has not been a revaluation since 2002. In the meantime, there has been a change in rental patterns, etc, which would have advantaged one sector over the other. When the revaluation job is done, that balance will, of course, have been restored. The additional levy that we propose under the small business rates relief will then be dropped.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his response. He will have noticed, in the media, comments by Tesco about its future investment plans. Does he believe that Tesco's assessment is accurate?

Mr Wilson: First of all, Tesco's response to this has been — I choose my words quite deliberately — absolutely pathetic. Here is a major company that is used to bullying its way around. However, it is not going to use bully-boy tactics on something that the Assembly has looked at, that has been proposed in the Budget and is a sensible way forward. Anyone who tells me that a £100 million investment project for which Tesco will look for a return over the next 20 to 25 years will be derailed by a temporary tax that relates to four stores and amounts to £840,000, at the most, spread over the 20- or 25-year term of that £100 million investment project, and that that kind of investment will be endangered, either has not done their sums very well or must think that we are all a bunch of idiots. That is equivalent to a 0·042% return over the 20-year period.

Now, if Tesco's investment in Northern Ireland is that perilous and precarious, I do not think that it is a wise investment decision and it should, probably, never have been made in the first

place. For that reason, I believe that it is bluffing and bullying. It will not get away with that.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. In particular, I note that rates are one vital way to help businesses in the future. Can the Minister tell the House how many people responded to the business rates relief scheme consultation and what some of the main issues were?

Mr Wilson: I do not have the exact numbers, but I think that there were around 80 responses to the consultation. I suppose that they were along fairly predictable lines. The people who are involved in small businesses in town centres welcomed the proposal and indicated that it would be one way to reduce their overheads. Those who are going to pay the 20% additional levy obviously said that it was going to cause them difficulties.

One other issue that came up, which I have taken note of and, indeed, want to put on record and give assurances on, is that many businesses, both large and small, indicated that, in the long term, the way forward is to have business improvement districts where local people and traders can decide how much they want to raise and how much they want to spend on that. Obviously, the 20% levy would have affected participation in the business improvement districts. For that reason, I put it on record again that I see it as a temporary measure. By the end of the current Budget period, the legislation should be in place for the bids and, at that stage, I would not see us having the 20% levy, plus business improvement districts. Those are some of the issues that emerged, and the detail of those responses will be shared with the Finance Committee in due course.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his robust answers. There has not been a revaluation of commercial properties since 2003. The next is planned for 2015: a gap of 12 years at a time of very volatile economic conditions. Will the Minister explain that gap?

Mr Wilson: We have seen difficulties as a result of that. I assume that that is what the Member is getting at. For example, I suspect that some of the larger stores that are being targeted in the small business rates relief scheme would have seen an uplift in their net annual value (NAV) anyway had we carried out the revaluation in 2010-11. There will be certain towns and parts of towns where there would have been a change in the NAV and the relative rates that would have been paid. Therefore, it has skewed the market somewhat.

The difficulty in trying to do a revaluation in 2010-11 was simply that the market was in such turmoil that, had we done it, first, we were concerned that it would not have met the international standards that are laid down for a proper valuation and, secondly, it would have been challenged very quickly because the data would have soon gone out of date. So we were between the devil and the deep blue sea, and we probably made the only choice that we could have, albeit I am not denying that it has caused some problems.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra.

Notwithstanding the view that every little helps, does the Minister consider that the average benefit to small businesses of £700 per annum is enough, and are there any other measures that he can take that will give added support to small businesses?

Mr Wilson: Rates were one of the biggest overheads, after rent, that small businesses faced. Therefore, the reduction, on average, of about £740 a year still had a sizeable impact on the overheads that the shops and the businesses were going to face. We have, of course, introduced other measures, which have been designed to help not just small businesses. I have made the point to some of the large retailers who have come to see me that we are the only part of the United Kingdom where, for the past four years, in real terms, there has been a freeze in the regional rate, and, for the next four years, in real terms, there will be a freeze in the regional rate. In no other part of the United Kingdom have large or small businesses had that kind of benefit in local taxation. That was a conscious decision to help businesses in Northern Ireland, which was made against some opposition in the Assembly during the previous Budget debate. The small business rates relief scheme, as we are proposing it for next year, is an extension of what we have had in place for the past year.

EU Structural Funds: East Antrim

4. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the projects delivered

through EU structural fund programmes in the East Antrim constituency between 2005-06 and 2009-2010. (AQO 650/11-15)

Mr Wilson: From 2005-06 to 2009-2010, the EU structural funds programme awarded about £6·5 million to projects in the East Antrim constituency. There are about 100 different projects, but, for the sake of time — I imagine that you would probably rule me out of order, Mr Deputy Speaker — I am not going to read them out. I will send a copy to the Member and leave one in the Library.

Mr McMullan: I thank Mr Wilson for that answer. What is the estimated multiplier benefit to the East Antrim constituency?

Mr Wilson: A lot of the projects help to support small voluntary organisations, and, in some cases, that will pay the wages of workers. The money will be spent locally for services in the East Antrim economy. Some of the projects are bigger capital projects, and it is difficult to know whether the work is given to firms in East Antrim or beyond. However, given the nature of the spend and the fact that it tends to be local spend, the multiplier effect would be quite high, though we do not have an actual estimate of what it would be.

Mr Beggs: The Minister talked about smaller projects. Will he confirm that larger projects, such as the A8 at £115 million, could also be entitled to structural funds, so that moneys would be available for other improvements throughout Northern Ireland? That additional money would benefit the local economy.

Mr Wilson: There are very strict criteria for the way in which the money is spent. Some large projects in East Antrim have already benefited from it. Nearly £2 million has gone to the Gobbins path project, and because of the money that the council and other bodies are putting in, it will be of immense benefit to the area, not just in the construction of the Gobbins path, but, much more importantly, in the number of visitors that it will attract to East Antrim. Indeed, it is reckoned that that project could probably compete in visitor numbers with the Giant's Causeway once it is completed and with all the other spin-off effects that there are likely to be.

As far as roads projects are concerned, there is some danger that all the INTERREG money might not be spent in, I think, 2014-15, and there is some risk attached there. Therefore, we are looking to see whether we can put the funds towards any large projects that come under the criteria, so that we do not lose the funding.

Mr A Maginness: The Minister is noted for his Eurosceptical position. *[Laughter.]* I do not know whether the Minister was in the House of Commons for the vote last night, but I am sure that he will not resile from his Eurosceptical position. However, does he agree that European structural funds are a net benefit to Northern Ireland and that we should maximise opportunities therein?

Mr Wilson: I am very proud of my party's record. In fact, we were the only party that attended and had a 100% vote in favour of a referendum in the House of Commons last night. Indeed, we did not even have to be whipped in order to get there. Members may laugh, but do not forget the impact of Europe and European regulation on businesses in Northern Ireland and right across the United Kingdom, the amount of red tape, the loss of sovereignty and the fact that nearly 60% of the regulations that apply in Northern Ireland do not even get debated in this Chamber because they are imposed by some bureaucrats in Brussels. Therefore, there are very good reasons why people who have not had a say about our place in Europe for 52 years should have a say.

Now, what was the question? *[Laughter.]*

Maybe the Member should bear in mind that the United Kingdom makes a net contribution of £10·8 billion to Europe every year, and that money is not then available for spending on mainstream programmes. Indeed, if you look at the benefit that we in Northern Ireland receive from Europe and then take even the Barnett consequential of £10·8 billion and make it available to the UK Government to spend in our own country instead of it going to Europe, you will see that the net effect of us having control of that money would probably be that we would be quids in.

2.45 pm

Rates: Empty Properties

5. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the expected increase in domestic rates income annually, due to the introduction of rates on empty domestic properties. (AQO 651/11-15)

Mr Wilson: When the Executive agreed to introduce the rating of empty homes, my Department

estimated that up to £10 million would be available to us in the first full year of operation. The measure was introduced in October, and Land and Property Services has already sent out bills totalling £10 million for the half year. As it is a new taxation measure, we are not sure of the full amount.

We have a test, given the exemptions. Do not forget that some owners will be exempt because their houses are not capable of habitation. Some people will be exempt because, although they are the main dweller in the house, they are in a nursing home and, therefore, will not have to pay rates. Others will be subject to probate and, therefore, will not have to pay rates. Finally, a number of properties will already be occupied. We may have not yet identified that those houses are occupied, and they, of course, will become liable for rates. However, that is not a net gain as such because the properties were occupied anyhow.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Minister. You referred to exemptions. In my constituency of North Antrim, empty properties that are in the ownership of the banks have been allowed to become structurally insecure. Will those properties be rated even if there is no one living in them due to the banks' failure to secure them?

Mr Wilson: If houses are in the ownership of the banks and the banks have the right to use them, they will become liable for the rates. What determines whether a property is uninhabitable will be for the owner of the property and the district valuer to decide. When we talked about the issue, some landlords made the threat that they would simply go in and trash the houses. I really do not see any benefit in that because of the amount of trashing that would have to be done to make a house uninhabitable. It is not a case of just cutting off the electricity or water. For a house to be deemed uninhabitable, it will be required to be in quite a state of disrepair. I really do not see the financial benefit of people doing thousands of pounds worth of damage to houses that are in their ownership just to escape a year or two years' rates. Although there has been the scare that people will simply let houses fall into disrepair, if they do that, they will be allowing an asset to depreciate in value far more than the cost of the rates that would be imposed.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for coming to Coleraine at my invitation a couple of weeks ago to meet business owners and discuss this issue. When the Department seeks to identify domestic properties that have become empty only recently, how rigorous will the test be to establish the precise number of properties that are liable?

Mr Wilson: If a property has become vacant recently, we will know who the owner is. Therefore, there should not be an issue, and there will be continuity. If it was occupied and then becomes unoccupied, the bill will still go to that individual, so there really should not be a loss. The difficulty might come if the owner of a property that is empty has not been traced. There will be a gap as we seek to trace that owner. In doing that, we will use all the normal means. Sometimes we have used payment of utility bills, but I suppose the difficulty will be that if the property has been vacant for some time, there may not be payment of utility bills, and we will have to use other means of search.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Minister considered any initiatives around the domestic rate that might help to stimulate economic activity, particularly in the construction industry?

Mr Wilson: Not so much in relation to the domestic rate. Let me make something clear. As I said in answer to a previous question, as a result of decisions made by my predecessors and decisions made in the Budget over the past year, domestic rates in Northern Ireland will have been frozen for eight years by the end of the current Budget period. That is unprecedented anywhere else in the United Kingdom. It is unlikely to have an impact on stimulating the construction industry, but the announcement in the debate on the October monitoring round yesterday will have an impact. We have put an additional £10 million into the co-ownership scheme and, on top of that, have negotiated with the banks that they will make finance available for the mortgage end of that transaction.

As the Minister for Social Development said yesterday, that potentially means that, over the next four years, with the money that is already in the budget from last year and the additional money that we are committing, 2,400 new opportunities to purchase a home will be available. Many of those will be in the newbuild sector and will, therefore, feed into the construction industry.

EU Financial Transaction Tax

6. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact of the European Union's proposed financial transaction tax. (AQO 652/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have no direct responsibility for considering the impact of proposed taxation measures, but I believe that any proposed financial transaction tax should be applied globally. Otherwise, the transactions covered may simply relocate a business activity from one country to another. The big difficulty with the European Union proposal on financial transaction tax is that if it is not applied outside the European Union, many financial institutions, especially those that deal with the kind of transactions that are geographically mobile, may simply move out of the European Union to elsewhere. Of course, the country that would suffer disproportionately from that, because the financial services industry is so important to it, would be the UK. Given the efforts that have been made to attract many of the top financial services companies here to Northern Ireland, we would suffer disproportionately as well.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he detail whether there are any estimates of the possible economic impact that that proposal would have in relation to Northern Ireland?

Mr Wilson: I do not have figures for Northern Ireland, but the EU has done its own estimate of what the tax would mean. It is a very loose estimate, as you will see. The EU believes that, depending on what movement there was, it could reduce GDP across the European Union by between €21 billion with little or no movement and €216 billion with substantial movement. That would mean 71,000 jobs or up to 478,000 jobs right across the European Union. Since that would disproportionately fall upon the United Kingdom, I think that you can see the impact.

Do not forget — I see that he has gone —

Mr McDevitt: No, he is still here, Minister.

Mr Wilson: Oh, he has not gone. Sorry.

This is yet another attempt by the European Union to feed its insatiable appetite for taxpayers' money. The estimate is that it would generate about £57 billion of tax across the European Union. Of course, it is one of the ways — as well as raising VAT, which will hit the consumer — that the EU intends to feed its appetite for more money and more spend.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not a European ruling, but all remarks must be made through the Chair.

Mr Cree: Does the Minister not agree — I think that he will — that Europe should be focusing on developing its economies and encouraging recovery rather than creating a tax that will disproportionately affect the United Kingdom?

Mr Wilson: I agree absolutely. The Member's party does not have any Members in the House of Commons at the moment, but had he been there with us last night, I am sure that he would have voted with us to have a referendum. One of the reasons why I believe we need to look at renegotiating our position with the European Union is simply that a lot of what comes from Europe — the one-size-fits-all type of legislation — has been destructive of jobs in many parts of the United Kingdom. Of course, a financial transactions tax would have a severe impact on the United Kingdom. As I said, we should look at how successful we have been in attracting financial services companies to Northern Ireland. Therefore, such a tax would not be good news for us. We were able to attract those firms because, by their very nature, they are geographically mobile. However, they could be just as easily become mobile out of Northern Ireland again if such an imposition were placed on them.

Mr McDevitt: It would be helpful were the Minister to clarify that he is not excusing the casino banking that brought so much of the United Kingdom's economy to its knees over the past three years, that he is not excusing the sort of brass-plate banking that came to epitomise the worst side of the City of London, and that he is, in fact, not hiding behind a slightly myopic view of Europe —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must come to his question.

Mr McDevitt: — when, in fact, this tax deals with the underlying problem at the heart of our financial system.

Mr Wilson: Anyone who has listened to the criticisms of the banks that I have made in the Assembly knows that I have also made them in face-to-face meetings with the banking institutions. The Member knows very well that I do not hide behind anything when it comes to

criticising the banks for the policies that they have adopted or for the ways in which, despite the amount of government money that has gone into them, there has not been the necessary degree of regulation and control or the proper impositions on them to meet lending targets that they should have had. That has been a constant theme. I will meet Sir Mervyn King next month to talk about the impact of some banking practices in Northern Ireland. I meet Treasury Ministers in London and the Finance Minister in Dublin on a regular basis to ensure that banks that are subsidised by either the Irish or British Governments behave and make finance available for businesses in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Taxation: Retailers

8. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the proposed new tax levy on large retailers. (AQO 654/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The consultation on the proposals to introduce the large retail levy and to fund the small business rates relief scheme closed last Tuesday. Those proposals were aimed at rebalancing the domestic rating system during the period of the economic downturn through to recovery. Many town centre traders have expressed their concerns to us. One has only to look at town centres in Northern Ireland to see the numbers of vacant properties that there are. The measure is timely; the Committee for Finance and Personnel will discuss the 70-odd consultation responses, and it is also beginning an investigation. I hope that, by December, I will be bringing a paper to the Executive on the way forward.

Private Members' Business

Maze Prison Site

Debate resumed on amendments to motion:

> *That this Assembly recognises the potential social and economic benefits which the utilisation of former security sites, such as the site of the Maze prison, can bring to Northern Ireland; notes with concern the proposals to build a "peace-building and conflict resolution centre" at the site; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to develop this site in a way which is practical and inoffensive to victims. — [Mr Elliott.]*

Which amendments were:

No 1: Leave out all after "Northern Ireland;" and insert:

> *"acknowledges that the transformation of the Maze/Long Kesh site into a peace-building and conflict resolution centre must have due regard to the needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to prioritise this need whilst urgently progressing a development and job creation strategy for the site." — [Mr Eastwood.]*

No 2: Leave out "with concern". — *[Mr Givan.]*

Mr Newton: Those of us who sat through this morning's debate will come back to it with a degree of scepticism and, indeed, sadness about why the motion was tabled at this time.

The motion was prompted not by economic reasons but by underlying political ones. It is an attempt by the Ulster Unionist Party to, as it sees it, withdraw its earlier support for the initiative on the Maze/Long Kesh site and the conflict resolution centre.

3.00 pm

Member after Member indicated that the site offers an opportunity for Northern Ireland. It has huge economic potential. As has been said, it is twice the size of the Titanic Quarter project, which has started. It has the potential to assist Invest Northern Ireland in taking us to a new dimension in what we can attract to the site and the creation of, initially, construction jobs, which will help the hard-pressed construction industry, and the longer-term jobs that Invest NI would, no doubt, be helped in attracting to Northern Ireland through the provision of the site.

I do not think that I have heard a more negative approach to any motion or subject that the

Assembly has debated over the years that I have been here than that taken by the proposer of the motion, Mr Elliott. I say that with much sadness. The precursor to it was the UUP conference on Saturday. Claims were made there that the UUP led on issues like the devolution of corporation tax powers and air passenger duty. The mind boggles at those claims. As has been said, the motion is nearly in three parts. It has taken the UUP a long time to return to the issue to which it is taking exception. There has been huge press coverage of the matter. The development corporation has been established. When that happened around the Executive table, there was not a squeak from the UUP Ministers. The development corporation will take the issue forward. My mind boggles at why we are coming to that concern at such a late stage of the development.

When Mr Elliott rose, I got the feeling, because of his body language, that he was not quite comfortable. That became clear when Member after Member raised the role of the UUP, particularly its current chairman, in the development of the conflict resolution centre. He said that he had concerns about that centre. I listened carefully to what the leader of the Ulster Unionists said. I wanted to note his concerns, but I did not hear one concern being expressed. He did not articulate one concern about the peace and reconciliation centre. He set the tone for the other member of his party who spoke.

Mr Eastwood indicated that he was very —

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

Mr Newton: I will tell it at another time.

Mr A Maginness: The reason why we are in this House, in the view of the SDLP, anyway, is to try to bring about an end to conflict and to try to resolve the conflict and bring about reconciliation. The conflict resolution centre stems very much from the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement, which, courageously, was brought about by the Ulster Unionists. They did the heavy work in bringing about the agreement, and that is to their credit. However, in politics, you have to show consistency in your general political purpose, and I am not certain that, in this instance, the Ulster Unionists have shown that consistency. It is entirely consistent with their courageous position to sign and advocate the Good Friday Agreement for them to take the position that there should be a conflict resolution centre, albeit not necessarily at the Maze/Long Kesh. When we look at the history of this, we can see that the Ulster Unionists did, in fact, sign up to a conflict resolution centre at the Maze. Again, that was a courageous step. It does not bring any credit to the Ulster Unionists for them to resile from that position now. It does not help us to establish peace and reconciliation in our society. I have no doubt that the Ulster Unionist Party is committed to reconciliation and peace, but, in this instance, its position does not help to achieve that. I am disappointed that it has adopted that view.

Our view has been expressed already by Mr Eastwood. We support the development of the Maze site very much. The site has tremendous economic, industrial and business potential for Northern Ireland. It meets all the key criteria. The potential is there for us to use the site beneficially for all our people. Let us get on with that, and let us do that in a concerted fashion. It is common cause in the House that there should be intensive development on the site.

I support Mr Poots and Mr Girvan in their staunch advocacy of this. Indeed, I pay tribute to Mr Poots, who has been very consistent on the issue for many years, perhaps to his own political regret at some stage. He pushed for a national stadium, and he remained firm on that when others around him were not so firm. Not establishing a national stadium there for all three of our major sports was a missed opportunity. That, in itself, would have been a major act of reconciliation and conflict resolution.

I agree with those who have advocated the use of the site to promote peace, and I compliment those Members, in particular, Mr McCartney, who addressed the House passionately and said that republicans from the outset did not want an exclusive centre on the site. He said that they wanted it to be shared and that they wanted everyone to tell their story. If that is true — I accept Mr McCartney's genuineness and sincerity on this issue — there is nothing for any of us, particularly Members on the unionist Benches, to fear from this, not even Mr —

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member agree that, if and when the motion is, hopefully, passed, there should be no further delay in developing that enormous site for the benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland?

Mr A Maginness: I agree entirely with that and with Mr Lunn, who was most impatient to get on with the business of developing the site. He

said that it was painful that there has been so little development.

Even Mr Allister is persuadable, if not in relation to this site, then to a centre for conflict resolution. If we can contribute anything not just to our own society but to politics and conflict resolution throughout the world, we should invest and invest well in that site, so that we can act as a model for the rest of the world.

Mr Copeland: I intend to approach the matter honestly, directly and seriously, trying to avoid malice or giving offence. Many Members expressed views that are individual and that represent their party in the Chamber on what is an important issue. I thank them for their contributions, each of which I value, even though I may not necessarily agree totally with all that was said.

It is true to say that Mr David Campbell was chairman of the Maze consultative panel, which met representatives from all four parties in 2003 and made a final report in February 2005 that included a proposal for an international centre for conflict transformation. That was then; this is now.

At one time, I served as a soldier in the Ulster Defence Regiment. My wife served as a constable in the Royal Ulster Constabulary. She and I are very proud of the service that we believe we gave the entire Northern Ireland population throughout that time. I say without malice that individuals and groups are represented in the Chamber and perhaps, on occasion, are even present in the Chamber who, at one time, regrettably, would have considered me, my family and those like us suitable candidates for murder. I must say, without malice and in truth, that, had some great misfortune befallen them, no tears would have been shed by me at their wake. But that was then; and this is now. Things change, and policies and positions change.

I listened to the First Minister, whom I have known for many years, who agrees with the first and concluding parts of the motion tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party. He has issues, as he is entitled to, with the section in the middle. The first part of the motion states:

> *"That this Assembly recognises the potential social and economic benefits which the utilisation of former security sites, such as the site of the Maze Prison, can bring to Northern Ireland".*

That is a no-brainer for anyone in the Chamber; it is self-evident. The motion goes on to state that this Assembly:

> *"notes with concern the proposals to build a 'peace-building and conflict resolution centre' at the site".*

That wording is slightly different from what Mr Campbell, apparently, originally agreed to, but it means much the same, fair enough — *[Interruption]*. The first words were an "International Centre for Conflict Transformation", and the second were "a peace-building and conflict resolution centre". We then get to the bit that:

> *"calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to develop this site in a way which is practical and inoffensive to victims".*

I had and have concerns. They are not manufactured or contrived. They are mine, and they are genuine. In some ways, they are based on a visit many years ago to a jail in Dublin. I cannot remember whether it was Kilmainham or Mountjoy. I went in among the Americans and got the potted history of 1916. At each cell, I was told by a very nice tour guide that this was where the British kept Mr, Mrs or whoever, before they shot them — cell after cell after cell. I had the temerity, knowing something of the history of this island, to ask where Mr de Valera kept those whom he shot — they were kept in the same jail, and there were more of them — and I was asked to leave.

3.15 pm

Recently, an article appeared in the press about — forgive me, my Irish is weak — the Tí Chulainn cultural centre near Mullaghbawn, which is funded by European Peace money. On that occasion, the contribution to peace appeared to consist of children dressed in camouflage playing, if that is the right word, with RPG-7s and AK-47s and doing, presumably, God knows what in their mind. That sends a shiver down the spine of those who tried to serve, remain within the law and remain fair.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Copeland: Mr Poots, I do not send my words to march on your time, sir, and I will not permit yours to march on mine.

The creation of a centre in the hope that it prevents any recurrence would be desirable.

Personally, whether it is located at the Maze or not at the Maze is of little issue to me, provided that the words of the First Minister, which I have no reason to doubt, are correct. He said that he would not permit the centre to be a shrine for terrorists and that he did not think that the deputy First Minister wished it to be so.

Shrines are funny things. Two Saturdays ago, I was called to a house on the Donegall Road. Both the 86-year-old woman and 84-year-old man living there have Alzheimer's. They did not know their national insurance numbers, but they did know that they had been burgled five times in almost as many months. Their life savings of £5,000 have gone. When their central heating boiler broke down a fortnight ago, they could not afford to fix it. Behind the door in the hall were two frames: one contained a certificate from the Chief Constable thanking the lady for intervening during an armed robbery — she skulled an armed robber with her handbag rendering him unconscious and subject to arrest — and the second contained a photograph of their son, who was murdered while serving as a prison officer. That was her shrine. The house has been burgled five times. They did not know what benefits they were entitled to and had a central heating system that could not be fixed. Their grief is private; their pain is private. If this centre must be built, it must be built sensitively, and, if it is built as described, I will have little argument with that.

Others have changed their position. On 26 June 2007, Mr William McCrea spoke to the 'News Letter' about his complete objection to the idea, albeit of a sports facility. He said:

> *"Under no circumstances whatsoever do I accept that there should be any shrine or anything at all connected with the tragedy, heartache and heartbreak the IRA inflicted on the people of Northern Ireland. This must not … happen."*

But that was then, and this is now. The 'News Letter' report continued:

> *"North Belfast DUP MLA Nelson McCausland - joining Mr McCrea, Nigel Dodds, Sammy Wilson and others in the party - said: 'Moreover, the proposal to develop a centre at the Maze was compared by Edwin Poots to German camps from the Second World War, some of which draw thousands of visitors every year. However, that comparison is also invalid. Camps such as Auschwitz serve as a reminder of the evil of Fascism and are a warning of the depths to which men can sink. The German people have repented of the Nazi era and Auschwitz does not contain a Nazi version of the story. That is the difference. The IRA have not repented of their terrorism and Sinn Fein will demand that their story be told in any centre at the Maze.'"*

But that was then, and this is now.

I consider, Mr Speaker and Members, that you might forgive me my concern and accept the motion that we tabled because, in many cases, that concern is real. There will be people not living in the past but, as I have said before, with the past living in them. An obligation falls on us to do what must be done to ensure that it does not happen again. If the First Minister's words are right and if the deputy First Minister's thoughts are as witnessed by the First Minister, we need fear nothing, but, for me, the concern is still there.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that, if this amendment is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2, as the wording to which it relates will have been deleted. I hope that is clear.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 63; Noes 15.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr S Anderson, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D Bradley and Mr Eastwood.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Copeland and Mr Nesbitt.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly recognises the potential social and economic benefits which the utilisation of former security sites, such as the site of the Maze prison, can bring to Northern Ireland; acknowledges that the transformation of the Maze/Long Kesh site into a peace-building and conflict resolution centre must have due regard to the needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to prioritise this need whilst urgently progressing a development and job creation strategy for the site.*

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

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members either to take their seats or to leave the Chamber. We wish to continue with the business of the House.

Community Pharmacies

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

I wish to advise Members that there is an application for judicial review before the courts on areas associated with the debate. I, therefore, caution Members to be particularly careful that they say nothing in their contributions that may prejudice those proceedings.

Mr McKay: I beg to move:

> *That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put a contingency plan in place to protect pharmacy services in rural and socially disadvantaged areas following the introduction of new funding arrangements.*

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I am very cognisant of your opening comments, as all Members should be.

Community pharmacists have reached crisis point, and, as it says in the motion, a contingency plan needs to be put in place as a matter of the utmost urgency, regardless of any other considerations that are before us. The issue has been under the radar for a considerable time, and it is welcome that it is before the House. I am sure that there will be a healthy debate on the issue, and, hopefully, we can come to agreement on the way forward.

It is important that the House recognise that many pharmacists face going to the wall over the coming days, weeks and months. Job losses are increasing: at the last count, 125 posts had been lost. The service that pharmacies provide to the public, which is the purpose of community pharmacies, has also decreased. Given the present economic circumstances, the rise in poverty and the health impact of those on our communities, this is totally the wrong time for community pharmacies to be taking that sort of hit.

I have spoken with many pharmacists in recent weeks in my constituency and across the North. Sometimes community pharmacists are put into a box and seen as merely providing medicines and certain other products. However, the pharmacists whom I know and work with are much more than that. I recently spoke to a

pharmacist who goes above and beyond the call of duty on many occasions in the community. He is very proactive; he holds events in community centres and works with community associations. That is vital work, particularly in rural communities. I am afraid that such pharmacists may not be with us in the new year, and we must ask what impact that will have on our communities.

Pharmacists face many challenges and questions about whether they will lay off staff or close their businesses, which may leave communities without pharmacies, particularly in rural areas They and their families are also under immense stress because of financial pressures and the fact that people rely on them to service their communities.

The pharmacy sector faces a loss of £38 million this year, which is a 30% cut. Regardless of sector, a cut of 30% — nearly one third — will have a devastating impact; we cannot get away from that. A Community Pharmacy NI (CPNI) survey shows that 75% of contractors have been forced to reduce pharmacy staff. It also shows that the levels of stress and concern have increased, and 30% of pharmacists will now have to close on Saturdays.

Let us not forget about the workers who are caught up in this matter as well. There are many part-time workers in pharmacies and full-time pharmacists. A number of companies are facing questions about whether they can stay on. We need to be mindful of where this may end up. After the judicial review is completed and a number of other factors are played out, we need to ensure that the rights of employees are protected, jobs are secured and, in certain instances, pay is protected as well. I have had a number of phone calls from employees; parts of the sector are concerned about the way forward and some of the proposals that they have seen. We need to be cognisant of that.

Many rural pharmacies have expanded their businesses in recent times and brought in new staff, primarily to meet the needs of the community. They are holding out as long as they can to ensure that those jobs are protected so that they can continue to provide a service to the community. It is a matter of extreme concern that 70% of those community pharmacies struggle to meet the demands of wholesalers for payment. Indeed, 20% have defaulted on their payments. That is one in five. Many wholesalers will not release further medicines in light of those defaults, so already businesses are under extreme pressure.

We, therefore, call on the Minister to work with pharmacies to develop a co-ordinated approach based on fair levels of funding. We do not believe that that is too much to ask. All pharmacists ask for is fairness in that regard. In health provision, when we talk about front line services, we talk about ambulances and hospitals, but community pharmacies are a front line service. Because they deliver a multiplicity of services and flag up certain ailments for the people who come through their doors, they need to be viewed as a front line service as well.

I have already outlined that pharmacies are willing to work with the Minister and the Department to ensure that they can realise savings. We are talking about cuts of over £30 million. We have seen proposals that clearly outline that those savings could be made by way of other methods, namely generic switches, therapeutic switches and dose optimisation. Trial studies have already been carried out in parts of the North, and those savings have been realised. We need to look at how we can mainstream that and ensure that savings can be made across the board.

It was the case until recently that pharmacists could advise on flu, hay fever and other minor ailments, thus taking the pressure off GPs and A&E departments. That was until the minor ailments scheme was also removed from pharmacies. There is no doubt that healthcare needs to evolve to meet the needs of local communities and to take account of the changing financial circumstances that we face. Pharmacies will have to take their share of the financial burden, and pharmacists recognise that fact. It is important to put that on the record. Pharmacists have suggested many cost-savings mechanisms that would save millions of pounds. However, they are not being listened to; instead the Minister seems to be ploughing on with a policy that will result in pharmacies becoming a rare sight in rural villages and at the heart of rural communities. That would be a great shame.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank the Member for giving way. The Minister is not ploughing on with anything. The Minister has been left a legacy by a previous Minister and, as

a result of a judicial review, has been unable to intervene. I would very much like to engage with pharmacists; I have a strong desire to do so. It is incorrect to say that I wish to plough on with anything. I want to engage but currently cannot.

3.45 pm

Mr McKay: Regardless of that factor, these pharmacies are going to the wall, jobs will be lost and services will be lost over the coming weeks and months. So, regardless of what is happening in the courts, the Health Department can put in place a contingency plan to ensure that those services are not lost to the community, and the Minister needs to recognise that.

My party recognises that the way forward for healthcare is not only to look after the sick but to prevent people from getting sick in the first place. In her time as Health Minister, my party colleague and current Member of the European Parliament Bairbre de Brún introduced the Investing for Health strategy. For that to work, it must have the co-operation and support of all agencies involved in healthcare provision in our communities. We should be investing further in our local pharmacies, not slashing them. We have to invest to save, and that is not a complicated thing. It is short-sighted not to, when the reality is that, in the not-too-distant future, we will rely more on local community-based projects to deliver our healthcare, and pharmacies will be to the fore of that.

To conclude, I simply ask that the Minister restore the minor ailments scheme and establish the community pharmacies, which are visited daily by close to 10% of the adult population and are a key component of our health promotion network. I ask that he resolve the community pharmacy contract negotiations and swiftly implement that contract. He should also provide fair and reasonable funding for community pharmacies, particularly dispensing fees and special advance payments. That is not something that has come from pharmacies or from us: it is from this year's DUP manifesto.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to get involved in the debate. There is no doubt that community pharmacies play a vital role in the lives of everyone in Northern Ireland. They are at the front line of health provision and provide a crucial service for any local community. They offer important medical advice that is invaluable in helping to limit non-emergency visits to GPs and can reduce the workload in our A&E units, which, in turn, helps to reduce the demand for hospital beds. The public build up relationships with, and trust in, their local chemist. They value the professional service given by our pharmacists and their staff. It is a popular, reliable sector, and one that is well used and respected by many.

The work of our local chemists in providing and delivering medication every week is vital, particularly for the elderly and vulnerable in society, who often live in isolation in their homes and may be unable to travel to their local pharmacy. I recently went out with a local community pharmacist in his car. It may be difficult to accept, but that was in Helen's Bay. I saw for myself the vital service that he provides. The professionalism and dedication to his work was clear. The evidence was there, on the faces of those who received their mediboxes. I am sure that you have all been lobbied about how time-consuming mediboxes are to maintain and to service, but I think that we recognise the invaluable work done on that issue by pharmacists.

This was an example of a relatively small urban community. Nonetheless, the importance of the service was evident during my time spent out and about with the chemist. I am sure that many Members have, like me, met other pharmacists, and I share their aim to see a high level of service provided across this important sector. We need to ensure that pharmacy services are effective and efficient. It is important that we have a network of pharmacy outlets spread across our cities, towns and villages. We must ensure that pharmacy services in rural and socially disadvantaged areas are protected. With any changes in funding, we need to keep focused on providing effectiveness and efficiency. The increased use of generic drugs is a practical and positive example of how effective savings can be made without reducing service quality. That is an example of what could be done in the wider context of community pharmacies.

Pharmacies provide a vital service, including with their outreach, health checks and screening programmes. I know that lives have ultimately been saved through their initiatives. Such measures are worthwhile and should be supported. Pharmacies provide an effective go-between for many who may not feel comfortable going to their local GP and for those who find it a strain to go to A&E hospitals. That support from chemists is vital, and we as an Assembly should do everything to support it.

It is important that we do all that we can to protect and maintain pharmacy services in rural areas and in areas of social deprivation. It is also important that the needs of smaller independent pharmacies are listened to and that they are given adequate support. Those pharmacies are crucial, as they are often located in isolation to other outlets and are the backbone of small communities and areas of social deprivation. It is important that any future negotiations and changes involve small independent pharmacies just as much as the larger chains. We need to ensure that the central issue is provision not profit.

I believe that the Minister's door is open on the issue. I feel that a location-based funding arrangement may be the best way forward on the matter. There is certainly a big difference in footfall. Compare, for example, the footfall at a chemist in Bloomfield shopping centre in Bangor with that at a chemist in Helen's Bay or the Loughview estate in Holywood, which are operating in isolation and are serving small communities.

We all recognise the severe financial pressures that the health service is under, and I feel that an inclusive, mature and constructive approach by pharmacies is the best way forward as we try to ensure the best delivery of a first-rate health service to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Gardiner: I believe that we need to seek ways to increase the Health Minister's budget, so that he can provide a separate ring-fenced budget for the additional community services that are provided by rural pharmacies. The Health Minister's budget should be able to call on additional financial support from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department for Social Development (DSD) to help to pay for the community support work that is carried out by those pharmacies.

I begin by reminding the Assembly that about one third of all people in Northern Ireland live in rural communities. So, the issue is not a marginal one. It is very much a core issue for the Assembly. This is not special pleading but a concrete proposal based on the delivery of concrete services that deserve to be paid from the public purse.

Poor transport links between local areas dramatically reduce patients' access to local community-based services. Some pharmacies provide a free prescription delivery service to elderly and infirm patients in outlying country areas. Many of those patients are on a one-care package and have no close family to support them. They are isolated and alone. This is typical of the kind of underfunded local services provided by rural pharmacies that have been put in jeopardy because of broad-brush funding cuts.

I am asking the Health Minister to reconsider those specific services and to make proper budgetary provision for them. They are essential services, not operational extras. Further to that, he should ring-fence a specific funding stream and put in place measures to assess the nature of the additional local services provided by rural pharmacies. I would be surprised if much-talked-about rural proofing does not pick up on those services. However, if it does not do so, we would need to look at it again to make sure that it is fit for purpose.

Community pharmacies are visited daily by 123,000 people across Northern Ireland, which is 8% of the population. So, anything that puts the viability of those pharmacies in jeopardy will have a big effect on the whole population. It will also have a damaging effect on local employment in pharmacies at a time when every job counts in sustaining the viability of the local economy. As the first port of call, community pharmacies also relieve the pressure on primary care provision, helping the Department to make savings in the primary care area.

In proposing that the Health Minister's budget should get an injection of extra money from OFMDFM and DSD, which both have community-support roles, I am suggesting that the Minister increase his community pharmacy budget to pay for the real community support work that those pharmacies carry out.

Mr Durkan: As Members who spoke previously stated, community pharmacy is a vital component in the provision of healthcare in the North. Not only do community pharmacies support the work of GPs and hospitals by delivering a high-quality dispensing service, but they deliver numerous important support initiatives and services.

I am aware of many pharmacists and staff in my constituency who dedicate their time not only to administering to patients, but to promoting healthy living. At present, they face difficult decisions. How much longer can they afford to provide weight management advice, run smoking cessation clinics and work with young people

in communities on sexual health and alcohol abuse? Community pharmacies provide a community service.

I am sure that all MLAs have been lobbied strenuously on the issue. I have received correspondence and calls not just from pharmacists, but from service users. For many people, their local pharmacy is the first port of call when they have a small health complaint. Indeed, the minor ailments scheme that ran a couple of years ago was heralded as a success by all. Pharmacies compare favourably with GPs and hospitals in patient satisfaction surveys. They deliver professional care and advice in a personal manner. Vitally, they assist individuals swiftly and without the delay of appointments and waiting times. They also alleviate demand on other primary care providers.

We hear much talk of primary care partnerships. Pharmacies are an integral component in the patient-centric model of healthcare delivery that is essential as demand grows and resources dwindle. In its manifesto, the SDLP recognises the importance of community pharmacies and of safeguarding their funding. We remain committed to that.

Community pharmacy in the North is fast approaching crisis point with 125 job losses in the sector so far, not to mention reduced opening hours and, therefore, reduction in service. Current funding arrangements certainly do not seem to be working. Attempts have been made and proposals submitted that identify what could and should work. They have been rejected. Now, we are in a situation in which some pharmacies are facing into an abyss. Seventy per cent struggle to meet wholesaler payment demands. Alarmingly, 65% report delays in medicine supplies to patients. With a smaller number of GPs dispensing in the North compared with other parts of the UK, medicines will not reach people who desperately need them. Furthermore, closures are inevitable should we fail to act.

I welcome the motion because it definitely marks a desire to protect community pharmacies, notably in areas where there may be presumed greater need, particularly in rural areas, where pharmacies are often the only accessible means of health assistance. However, it is important that we do not create a two-tier system. Often, need is determined by other demographic issues, such as age, rather than by socio-economic conditions. Therefore, although I recognise and support the motion and its sentiment to protect the perceived most vulnerable areas, it does not go far enough. It is, though, certainly a step towards protecting those irreplaceable services.

The fact that community pharmacies are able to make real savings for the Department, and have already done so, has to be recognised. That has been exemplified by prescription intervention schemes that involve switching to generic drugs as well as dose optimisation. Furthermore, by promoting healthy living through community development programmes, community pharmacies quite clearly demonstrate the role that they can play in health promotion and preventative action, which are key elements of the Minister's own stated vision for the way forward.

The service is not just vital; it represents value for money. I implore the Minister to act immediately.

4.00 pm

Mr McCarthy: First, I thank Daithí McKay and Michaela Boyle for bringing this important issue to the Assembly. It is an issue that affects every man, woman and child in Northern Ireland, and we beg the Minister to listen to what is necessary to support local pharmacies, even on a temporary basis, and thereby support our local communities.

As other Members have said, local pharmacies and chemists have played a pivotal and vital role in the delivery of first-class front line health provision for many years. I pay tribute to their work, dedication and outstanding desire to help every customer who crosses their threshold. As public representatives, we must play our part to ensure that that work continues for all in our community.

I was extremely disappointed to read that Minister Poots is supposed to have said that Northern Ireland has up to 100 pharmacies too many, compared with areas across the water. The motion seeks protection for services in rural areas and in areas of deprivation and disadvantage. I fully support that. We cannot stand idly by and allow pharmacies in isolated regions to bear the brunt of savage cuts of, as other Members have said, up to 30%. That is catastrophic for local pharmacies. The Minister has not acknowledged his obligation in law to provide a fair and reasonable system of

remuneration to community pharmacists. He must start to do that now, before it is too late.

Not that long ago, the Department curtailed the valuable work carried out by pharmacists by throwing aside the minor ailments service, which has been referred to by other Members. That work had proved invaluable to the whole community. People with minor health conditions could simply walk into any pharmacy and seek advice and medicine for coughs, colds, headaches or other such ills. The minor ailments service undoubtedly kept many patients out of GPs' surgeries or A&E units at the various hospitals.

In answer to a recent question, the Minister admitted that, after extensive negotiations with Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland, agreement could not be reached, and thus the downhill spiral started for the service. Like other Members, I have had discussions with Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland and many pharmacists throughout my constituency. It is obvious that despair has set in, with pharmacists, in some cases, unable to settle accounts with suppliers. The end result is that appropriate medicines are not always in stock. That is a disservice to our patients. Staff have had to be laid off. I understand that over 100 qualified people have already had to be released. Unless the Department and the Minister step up to the plate, that figure could rise, I understand, to as high as 600.

The pharmacies are willing and anxious to get round the table to arrive at an amicable agreement to stem the flow of rundowns. They have had many good and sensible ideas to save on wastage — for instance, medication review, repeat dispensing, public information campaigns and generic switches. The Health Committee was recently visited by a GP from the Western Health and Social Care Trust, where savings of over £60 per intervention was achieved. If that can be done in one place, it can be repeated all over Northern Ireland, with massive savings that could be ploughed back into the community service.

Many health problems can be prevented, and the pharmacy is best placed to provide services such as smoking cessation, healthy eating, exercise and addiction services, all of which require government backing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Would the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party fully supports the motion, and everyone in the Chamber is singing from the same hymn sheet. Our Assembly has spoken. Let us see a positive response from our Minister.

Ms Lewis: I support the motion and am grateful for the opportunity to take part in today's debate. I have no doubt that the entire Assembly is united in understanding the importance of community pharmacies and the extremely valuable work that they do. We know that they are a vital component of healthcare delivery and that they are often the first port of call for people who have ailments or health problems. Crucially, it is sometimes overlooked that they have the ability to build relationships and trust in communities where, sometimes, dispensing factual advice and reassurance can be just as important as dispensing medicines.

We recognise that, in rural and isolated communities that might be further away from doctors' surgeries and hospitals, pharmacies are an integral part of the fabric of local society. As with post offices and corner shops, it is only when they are threatened with closure that we really appreciate their worth. Many people in my constituency have told me how important their local pharmacy is to them. It is right that pharmacies stay local, but it is also right that pharmacies' main purpose should be to provide effective health provision that is not driven by profit alone.

We have an excellent pharmacy service in Northern Ireland. We have higher provision than anywhere else in the UK. We have 30 pharmacies in Northern Ireland per 100,000 people. That compares favourably with England, which has 21, Scotland, which has 23, and Wales, which has 24. We want to retain that level of care but not at any price.

Like many services in this economic climate, the pharmacy service faces new pressures and tough decisions. Northern Ireland is not exempt from harsh realities, and it is not enough merely to point to the historical numbers of pharmacies in each community and say that that is how it has always been. However, for all the pressures of the economic downturn, it is encouraging to note that there are four new applications to open pharmacies, with a further 27 applications awaiting decision on appeal, which suggests to me that, whatever the future may be,

pharmacies will continue to be an integral part of community and business.

As regards the challenges facing rural pharmacies, it is right that we support smaller enterprises and that they are given practical help so that they can continue to provide value-for-money services. I welcome the fact that the terms of the essential small pharmacies scheme have not changed. In addition, all pharmacies can qualify for an additional professional services payment of £1,500 per month, if they meet certain criteria. That is also a welcome arrangement. The motion deals with the concern about the future of pharmacies in rural and socially disadvantaged areas, and the retention of those means that there is a guaranteed funding scheme for smaller pharmacies. That is good news, and it is to be welcomed by pharmacies in those areas.

We know that a judicial review of the new funding arrangements is under way, but, once a judgement is reached — whatever it may be — we hope that all parties can work together to reach an agreed solution that will result in better outcomes for the customer and value for money for the Government. We all want to see strong, sustainable pharmacies across Northern Ireland, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas, and I welcome the arrangements that are in place to make that happen.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the broad consensus in the House on this important issue. I also welcome the Minister. The motion was tabled a number of weeks ago, but we are only debating it now because there were issues around the Minister's availability. Therefore, I welcome the fact that the Minister is present to hear the broad support from every party in the House on the issue.

The message is loud and clear today that pharmacies here are in crisis. The 30% funding cut means that owners struggle to meet basic business costs. They cannot pay their wholesalers, and staff are being laid off. Around 125 members of staff — a ballpark figure —have been laid off, and requests are coming in for pharmacists to reduce opening hours, further reducing that service. We have to recognise that the pharmacy service is one of those areas where there is a very high satisfaction level — somewhere in the region of a 94% to 96% satisfaction rating. No other area of any of our services commands as high a satisfaction rating and such broad public support as our pharmacies.

Pharmacies have stepped up to the mark. For example, many pharmacists have invested significantly to install consultancy rooms so that they can see people who call at their pharmacy with privacy and dignity. There has been quite a bit of investment. Many rural villages have decided to invest in pharmacy services to an extremely high standard. Pharmacists have been very innovative. For instance, people flocked to the first pharmacist in my constituency to do blood pressure checks. He also did cholesterol checks, and he is thinking about diabetes management and other areas in which he can provide a better service to support local GPs and the local community. That has to be commended.

It has not been mentioned here today that pharmacists are really the front line of the front line. Any of us can drop in and pick something up or see a pharmacist without an appointment or without having to go through hoops to get there. Pharmacists can also recognise when someone is continually coming in and picking up paracetamol, for example, and buying it more often than expected. They can flag up problems such as dependency on over-the-counter or prescription drugs. They can often spot problems before the GP knows that they are happening. It is a service that we must not underestimate.

We had this issue a number of years back, when supermarkets tried to take on pharmacy services. The impact of local people providing a local service to other local people means that we have a much safer regime. That cannot be put at risk. We have to ensure that pharmacies continue to do the very good work that they do.

As the mother of three small children, I pop into the pharmacy frequently. I might not have time or feel that something is serious enough to get a doctor's appointment. However, I can go into a pharmacist with a child with a rash, a cough or whatever and get a medical opinion straight away. They might say that I probably need to take the child to the GP or they can give me something to help the child. That service is invaluable.

I think that it was Pam who said that it is only when a service is threatened that you start to appreciate it. That is certainly the case, given not just the comments in the House today but the volume of letters that we receive

from district councils, playgroups, schools and concerned individuals. People recognise the importance of their local pharmacy.

Mr McCarthy: You forgot to mention that the Presbyterian church in Greyabbey wrote to the Health Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Gildernew: Thanks for that, Kieran. Yes, I was getting to the Presbyterian church in Greyabbey.

We need to recognise the very strong support for pharmacies across the board. Given our current regime and system, closures are inevitable, and we will experience more difficulties as we move forward. We could also experience disastrous consequences. I think that it was Sam who mentioned mediboxes. People have got used to taking whatever medication is in the box. They implicitly trust the person who filled out the prescription and put the medication in the box. If that is not done properly, it can have fatal consequences. Someone may take the wrong medication or take two days' medication in one day. We do not know the consequences of not providing pharmacists with the ability to provide the public with the excellent service that we are used to.

The Minister has said that he wants to do what he can. I encourage him to look at the current arrangement and how it is not viable in any way. It is interesting that one Member talked about a location-based funding arrangement. It is important that we recognise that location is key in this issue. As you have heard already, for rural areas —

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

Ms Gildernew: — and areas of socio-economic deprivation, the chemist is the most front line of all front line services. I ask the general public to support their local pharmacy, and I ask the Minister to come forward with a contingency plan as soon as possible.

4.15 pm

Ms P Bradley: I was about to start by outlining what has been said, but, by this point in the speaking order, most things have been said. I doubt that any Member of the Assembly — not least the members of the Health Committee — has not been lobbied on behalf of or by local community pharmacies. I have received numerous letters and visited pharmacists in both large multinational and small independent pharmacies to discuss their concerns.

The pharmacies in the area that I represent are truly at the heart of those communities and carry out an invaluable service that spans health and social care. Over the years, pharmacies have expanded their role in our towns and villages. Now, by virtue of the variety of services that they offer, including the current minor ailments scheme, they are seen as front line health providers. That scheme has alleviated the pressures on GPs and busy A&E departments. As was also said, among other services, they fill and deliver mediboxes, pill mills, blister packs or whatever you want to call them. That underrated service saves social care and acute services a great deal of money. From first-hand experience, I know that, if a patient is being discharged from hospital and requires assistance with medication due to poor understanding, it is essential that his or her medication is clearly marked in blister packs to protect not only the client but the care worker. Pharmacists endeavour to have those blister packs available for families to collect. They might even deliver the packs to the patient's home to ensure a timely discharge from hospital, thus preventing a delay and cost impact on our health service. For some using that service, the delivery of medication is their only social interaction. Equally importantly, it allows people to remain independent in their home while managing a range of long-term chronic diseases. If that service were to cease due to budgetary constraints, it would lead to an increased need for social care, an increase in hospital admissions and a possible delay in hospital discharges.

Recently, I attended the Belfast local commissioning group's public meeting. I was encouraged by the work being done in partnership with GPs and pharmacies to decrease costs through a reduction in prescribing and an increase in generic drugs. I look forward to that project being rolled out in Belfast.

It is sad that we have come to this stage. I back the Minister in his work thus far, given that he inherited the dilemma from the previous Minister. I look forward to a resolution that is beneficial to everyone, especially individuals in our community.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Members who tabled the motion, and I am pleased to speak to it. We could all go through the same points, so I will try not to go over too many in the same manner. All of us have been contacted by our local pharmacists, because there are genuine fears about the 30% cut and the downturn in the number of people coming through their doors. If you take that decrease in footfall further into the rural community, it could look much worse.

The cuts have the potential to be a disaster, but they need not be. The Department is keen to emphasise a fair and reasonable remuneration and wants the pharmacies to survive. However, we have to ask the Minister to be more obliging in how he takes the matter forward with the pharmacies. As other Members said, we are told that there are 500 community pharmacies, and we know and have already heard of the range of services that they provide. If some close, it will only move those services on to the next healthcare point, which might not suit most people. From what the Department said, there might be as many as 100 pharmacies too many. However, let us not just look at the numbers. Let us look at the geographical factors, listen to what the doctors and pharmacists advise and make sure that we manage the problem as cleverly as we can.

I am the representative for South Antrim, and it is not as huge a problem for us because we are near many urban locations. Nevertheless, many pharmacists from Randalstown, Crumlin and other areas have raised the issue with me. We have to look at the dispersal of the population and the lower catchment areas to determine how we can best keep pharmacies throughout the whole of Northern Ireland — not just looking at the numbers, but seeing how we can make everything work that much better.

I know that the Budget is not infinite, and we know that the pressure is on and that cuts have to be made, but we need to find greater efficiencies. We know that pharmacies can advise on very many matters that are vital to many of us, such as smoking or obesity, but particularly on managing pills. Even the colour of pills was raised with me the other day: the colours keep changing and many people lose their way with the pills that they are taking for that reason. Let us also remember that we do not want to clog up hospital beds. We want to see a very efficient health service, and that is where we were going. The Ulster Unionist Party made great strides in generic drug management between 2007 and 2011, and let us make more of that. We know from the pharmacies that, if we speak to them and use their skills, ideas and information, there are probably many more savings that we could make. I urge the Minister to manage that as best he can and to talk to those people about their good ideas.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As Paula Bradley said, having reached this stage, I am sure that everything that I was going to say has already been said. However, I will say it anyway, because I think that it is important. I will try not to be too boring.

Contingency plans are a matter of urgency because of the threat to many pharmacies. Approximately 125 posts have been lost. The importance of the pharmacy in the community, particularly in rural areas, cannot be overemphasised. It creates social networking, particularly for older people, who use it as a centre for meeting other people when they are collecting their prescriptions, and it is regarded as an essential element of the community. Thirty eight million pounds will be lost in the pharmacy sector, and, as has been mentioned, 75% of pharmacies have had to reduce staff, while 30% have had to close on Saturdays. There are issues around employees' rights and people losing their job, which are important. Furthermore, there are young pharmacists coming through, whose job prospects will be reduced. That will have an impact on the number of young people who have to leave this part of the world.

Pharmacies are geared to meet the particular needs of the communities that they serve. A co-ordinated approach is required, and I am sure that the Minister will consider that. It has been said that pharmacies are a front line service, and that is absolutely true. The pharmacy is often, as has been mentioned, the first port of call for many people who may need to see their doctor at a later stage but can be helped by the pharmacist. With proper advice and medication, people may not have to take up their doctor's time. The withdrawal of the service for minor ailments has been mentioned, and I am sure that the Minister will consider that a holistic approach is required in relation to healthcare, of which pharmacists are an integral part. If those services are lost, it will become more and more

difficult to replace them. The restoration of the minor ailments scheme and the resolution of contract negotiations are very much required.

Many people come to rely on their pharmacists and have an implicit trust in them. Having met many pharmacists and spoken to their customers over the past months, I can say that it is very clear that to reduce or remove rural pharmacies, in particular, could create huge problems, especially for older people who, in many cases, live in isolation and rely on family and neighbours to collect their medication from their local pharmacy. If those rural pharmacies are forced to close, it is possible that people will not be able to access vital medications because of their reliance on having them collected by other people or because they have to travel greater distances. Undoubtedly, that would cause more health problems, and more people will end up in hospital, increasing the burden on an already overburdened health service. I support the motion.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo. Go deimhin, ceapaim gur chóir go mbeadh scóip an rúin i bhfad níos leithne ná mar atá sí. Níor chóir é a theorannú ar bhealach ar bith. I support the motion. It should be as wide as possible. Like my colleague Mr Durkan, I believe that it should not be confined in any way.

When I was growing up in Bessbrook in County Armagh a short few years ago, we had two pharmacists: Mr Shields and Mr Doran. The villagers described them as being as good as any doctor. Today, we have Mr Foy in Bessbrook and Mr Strain in Camlough, and they are held in the same regard. That anecdote is an illustration of the value that communities place on the work of local pharmacists. Like many Members, I have visited pharmacies over the past number of months in Bessbrook, Crossmaglen, Newry, Camlough, Meigh and Cullyhanna. I have seen at first hand the dedication and professionalism of pharmacists and their staff. They are a valuable part of the community health infrastructure in all areas of Northern Ireland, and they play an important role in supporting public health on the front line. Other Members have outlined in detail some of the schemes that they operate to that end.

As I said, pharmacies provide a valuable service to the community right across the generations, from the earliest age right through to the older population, especially those with chronic and recurring illnesses. It is a service that no community wants or can afford to lose. As we know, pharmacists work in close conjunction with local GPs to support primary healthcare, which, in many cases, helps to ensure that vulnerable people can continue to live safely in their community without resorting to more expensive systems of care. Like other Members here, I have seen at first hand the care, work and patience that goes in to essential services such as multiple dispensing. That clearly helps people to live independently and avoid the more expensive option of hospitalisation. Are we now, under the present funding regime, going to ask pharmacists to run that service at a loss?

The work of pharmacists already saves the health service millions of pounds each year. Further savings can be made, and Members have outlined ways in which that can be done. Mr McKay mentioned the community pharmacy intervention programme in the Western Board area, which saves over £60 per intervention through generic switches. We have medication review, which makes sure that patients are taking medicines properly, and repeat dispensing, which avoids costly and unnecessary GP visits for repeat prescriptions. We also have dispensing interventions to avoid the unnecessary dispensing of medicines. Those are some ways in which pharmacists help to save the health service untold money each year. Drug wastage is another area in which significant savings are made, and further savings of up to £44 million each year can be made. Every year, £2·5 million is wasted on unused medication, 20% of which is unopened and has to be disposed of by pharmacies.

Pharmacists have told us all that they understand the straitened economic conditions in which we operate. They expect efficiencies and are willing to make them. The House was subject to a reduction of 30%, and we objected to that. The House would have been inoperable after such a swingeing cut. Do we expect pharmacies —

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

Mr D Bradley: — to operate under such a regime?

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Members for bringing this important issue to the House. I was glad to hear that the Member for North Antrim has read our manifesto. I am sure that

he learned many good things from it. Perhaps he will concur that it was an interesting read.

4.30 pm

In all seriousness, that issue needs to be addressed. I am conscious that there are legal constraints, and I am glad that those have not hindered a profitable debate. The beauty of devolution is — it is a cliché used, perhaps, too much in the Assembly — finding a Northern Ireland solution to a Northern Ireland problem. That rolls off the tongue very easily, but it is the direction needed to deal with community pharmacies. Although looking at what our counterparts do in the rest of the United Kingdom is welcome, it is important to realise that because of some very unfortunate events in our past, we find ourselves, in some ways, in a unique environment over here. The PWC report estimates that long-term unemployment is 40% higher, overall deprivation is worse, mental health issues are 20% to 25% more common over here, and population density is 67% lower. Those estimates are unique to us, and we need to look at them. I am heartened by conversations that have already taken place with the Minister. We are pushing at an open door on that issue.

That said, we have to be mindful of where the problem originated. The issue was inherited from the previous Minister, who, unfortunately, significantly mishandled the situation. When he was involved in negotiations, the importance of the community pharmacy network and the specific socio-economic landscape do not seem to have been considered properly. That left a gap, and we have to look at where the problems came from. Possibly, that conversation needs to happen on another day. Right now, it is an understatement to say that contractors are, undoubtedly, feeling the pinch because of what has been happening recently. That needs to be addressed in the future. As things stand, it will go only one way, so we need a solution, and we need to find it as quickly as we possibly can.

We need to listen to what the pharmacists are saying, and, if we do, we must dispute some of the comments made by Ulster Unionist Party Members. The pharmacists are not asking for more money; all that they ask is for some of the money that they make already to be left in the system. How that can be achieved needs to be looked at, and, unfortunately, the Members to my right do not seem to have learned from the errors of the previous Minister, whose solution to everything was more money, more money, more money. In the current economic environment, that is simply not possible, so we need to be more creative in finding solutions. Everyone agrees that we need the service to continue to support the people who need it. As things stand, I fear that there is a question mark over that.

Mr Storey: We are all concerned about our local pharmacies; mine are in my home village of Armoy and in Rasharkin, Dunloy, and so on. Does the Member agree that pharmaceutical companies could do far more to help the Minister and the Department to reach a point at which the funding arrangements would be fairer and more equitable so that small, local pharmacies in rural areas could continue?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I could not agree more with his point about pharmaceutical companies. In particular, they could help by providing substitutes for branded medicines. That road will not be without a few bumps because we are dealing with quite powerful individuals. However, it has to be considered, and the pharmacy contractors are more than willing to do so. Let us remember that the creative and innovative thinking of pharmacists brought us the generic medicines that we have now. With safety in numbers, they clubbed together and were able to produce much more cost-effective medicines after the branded versions came out of licence. We owe much to pharmacists for doing that and we should continually pay tribute to their work.

The debate is important because it sends out a good message that we care about our pharmacy contractors and want to make sure that they continue to be supported. It is a question of holding fire; we have to get beyond the judicial review. Once it is out of the way, I believe that the pharmacists are willing to negotiate. I will not speak on behalf of the Minister; I am sure that he can tell us what he is planning to do.

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

Mr D McIlveen: I support the motion.

Mr Dallat: I rise with enthusiasm to support the motion. The proposer, Daithí McKay, has been

most ingenious in the past with his plastic bags tax, and so on. Let us hope on this occasion that the contingency plans that he spoke about are real and do work. Perhaps it would be better if the legal difficulties that gag Members were lifted. I have high hopes that they will be within the next hour or two.

Until recently, pharmacists, if you are polite — chemists, if you are ordinary like me — were probably not the most vulnerable people; they were making a good living. It is important to remember that those whom they serve are the vulnerable people, whether in rural areas or those in urban or suburban areas who cannot afford public transport to go into town centres and are very often not well enough to do that. We must not forget those people.

We have been privileged in every town and village not to have followed what happened in England, and God knows beyond that, where the pharmacy disappeared, followed by the baker and the candlestick maker. They all went. In England, at least 60% of small towns and villages have nothing left. You often see film clips of people waiting on the weekly bus to get into town. That is what we are doing, and I just do not understand the logic. I was not consulted in any detail about these draconian measures that we are set upon.

Let us hope that, out of this debate, the Minister will realise — I believe that he will — that there are very strong feelings on this issue. This is not an issue that we can fundamentally turn upside down. Some time ago, I travelled to America. I thought that it was bad in England, but it is a lot worse in America, where they systematically denuded, if that is the word, their communities of any semblance of habitation.

We are at crisis point, and the adage "Eat horse and you will get grass" is long past. We have to find out what is happening; we want to know how this matter will be resolved. For years, I have felt strongly, and have spoken many times in the Assembly, about the need to protect our local services. We often talked about post offices. Post offices are critical — by God they are — but how much more important are local chemists? They are a lifeline.

This Assembly came into being as a regional institution principally to protect the most vulnerable. When the Good Friday Agreement — or the Belfast Agreement, if you are not comfortable with that — was signed, it promised equality. Well, this ain't equality for the most vulnerable in our society. We need to focus clearly. If there were ambitious plans to cull pharmacies, and I heard worrying remarks a few weeks ago, let us hope that we have put them to bed. Let us hope that they will not happen because the last thing that we want is ghost towns, with no services, provision or healthcare.

We in the Assembly are expected to defend and protect. I am sure that we all came to the Assembly with an ambition to make life better for everyone, and how much more honourable it is to make life better for the people who are most vulnerable. The chemists have, often at no charge at all, carried out services extremely well for those people.

I will finish, and I hope that I am not veering into the difficulties that this whole thing has presented. Chemists today are being refunded less money than they are paying the wholesalers for the products that they dispense. That is immoral, wrong and needs to be addressed.

Mr Poots: I have listened today with considerable interest, and I am grateful for the opportunity to respond and, indeed, to share with the House my observations of the community pharmacy sector.

I should say that we are having the debate in the context of a judicial review taking place, and I hope that that judgement will be heard sooner rather than later. I do not wish to infringe on that judgement in any way, shape or form. So, any comments about fees will not stray into whether I believe that those fees are valid or invalid because that will be a decision for a court.

I regret that CPNI felt it necessary to seek a judicial review in the first instance. Having only come into the ministerial post in May, I have not had the opportunity to engage with CPNI or representatives of the pharmacists on the issue, and I think that meaningful discussions could have led to a situation where the matter was resolved by now as opposed to being dragged out in courts. Whilst it may, to some extent, suit the larger pharmacists for the smaller pharmacists to go to the wall while the process is dragged out, it would have been much better had we been able to get round the table, have reasonable discussions and see whether we could come to a solution that particularly took into account the needs of rural pharmacies and pharmacies in areas of deprivation. I recognise that the public need them, but I am constrained

in what I can do at the moment because of the judicial review.

I will come back to some of the points raised by Members shortly, but, first, I want to put on record my support for and desire to have a viable, accessible and responsive community pharmacy network that is focused on the health and social care of the population. I am aware that community pharmacies score highly in the departmental surveys of public satisfaction. Indeed, the research instigated by my Department some years ago showed that some 9% of the population visits a community pharmacy on a daily basis. That identifies community pharmacies as the environment with the greatest interface with the public, healthy and ill, and thereby they have the opportunity to be highly influential in the nation's health.

I should say that we do not have a shortage of pharmacies in Northern Ireland, and 20 prescriptions are given out per head of population here, whereas the number in Wales is 23. Wales has 24 pharmacies for every 100,000 people, whereas Northern Ireland has 30 pharmacies for every 100,000 people. So, in spite of the fact that more prescriptions are being given out per head of population in Wales, which is quite a rural area as well, Northern Ireland has 20% more pharmacies. That sets in context the numbers of pharmacies that we have. In comparison to the rest of the UK, we have around 100 pharmacies more than would be the case if that was broken down across the United Kingdom.

Mr Durkan: Thank you for giving way, Mr Poots. I am heartened by your reception of today's debate. Does the Minister accept that we may have more pharmacies per head of population because of the conflict that we are moving out of and because of the community relations or lack thereof here?

4.45 pm

Mr Poots: That may be the case, but one reason why I identified Wales as a comparator instead of England, which has large cities such as London and Manchester, is because Wales has quite a rural community and more prescriptions are given out per capita. However, the Member's point has some validity: in areas around Belfast in particular, there may be pharmacies quite close to each other that are used by one community or the other exclusively. It is unfortunate, but it is reality.

Many Members have spoken today about the importance of pharmacies in rural areas where access to professional healthcare is often more limited than it would be in a major conurbation. I have no doubt of the worth and potential to make them even more beneficial to those communities. The Building the Community-Pharmacy Partnership programme has been prominent in many areas. It was initially established through my Department and managed through the Community Development Health Network and seeks to support and empower local communities allied to taking responsibility for their own health and social care. It is an important success story for community pharmacies and the community and voluntary sectors working together.

The new funding arrangements have also featured prominently in the debate today. Although I cannot comment on individual cases or details discussed at the judicial review, I think that it is important that the Assembly knows something of the existing funding arrangements with community pharmacies.

The arrangements are primarily around fees for dispensing services and other fees for professional services, albeit that the structure of the contract means that there is a global sum, or ceiling, to the remuneration obtained. The value of the global sum has remained unchanged between 2010-11 and 2011-12. In addition, pharmacists have often benefited historically from the difference between what the Department paid them for the drugs that they purchase, through the Business Services Organisation — what we refer to as reimbursement — and the actual amount that they paid to wholesalers or suppliers.

Over the years, various discounts or clawbacks were applied to seek to control the profit element in the interest of protecting the public purse, yet transparency of profit remained elusive. England made the first move to quantify an amount of profit that could be allowed, which was controlled through a revised tariff. Scotland has a broadly similar approach. More recently, the previous Administration introduced a new tariff in Northern Ireland, which was based on the English model. This sought to provide a guaranteed purchase profit of at least £16·5 million, which is commensurate with levels in England and Scotland. CPNI claims that that is not enough and is tantamount to reducing its

income by one third from the procurement of drugs alone.

At the heart of this issue is the lack of transparency about contractors' profits. Indeed, we have increased our levels of generic prescribing from 43% in 2005 to 62% in 2011. That has also meant that community pharmacies have benefited simply because of the differentials in acquisition and reimbursement costs that are higher for generic drugs. It is right, and it is in the public interest, that this is controlled at a fair and reasonable level.

In my opinion, what we spend on drugs in Northern Ireland is out of hand. We have a cost, as regards community pharmacies and the drugs dispensed through them, of £459 million, and another £109 million is spent in hospitals: a total of £568 million is spent on drugs in Northern Ireland each year. I think that that sum is unacceptable. It is the second highest cost in my Department, and it is close to the kind of spends that entire Departments, such as the Department for Regional Development or the Department for Social Development, spend. It is five times the amount that the Department of the Environment or the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure spends. If there are savings to be made, we need to identify them and address the problem. I believe that pharmacists can be part of the solution in identifying those savings, and that is why I would have liked to have got round the table with them as opposed to having people engaged on our behalf in a court of law.

I have also moved to open up negotiations with community pharmacists whereby, if they can secure better prices for medicines, I am prepared to share some of the benefits between the public purse and the community pharmacy contractors. I have also indicated that, once judgement has been made, I am prepared to discuss further with community pharmacies the future of pharmaceutical provision and its associated funding. I am keen to engage. Indeed, my officials have endeavoured to maintain dialogue with members of CPNI.

Future engagement is not primarily about money — important though it is — it is about services, access to services and how best to configure the pharmacy network. It is also about independent pharmacies as much as the multiples. However, I am concerned that the interests of the large can often easily jeopardise the interests of the small. Generally, small pharmacies are located in deprived or rural areas where the pickings do not seem to be as rich to the multinationals.

Increasing numbers of pharmacies are being amalgamated into large groups or chains. Although many pharmacies continue to be operated by their pharmacist owners, a significant number of pharmacists working in the community are employees rather than owners of the pharmacies in which they work. Furthermore, retailing has seen the arrival of the global competitor who can replicate success in cities and towns throughout the country. Indeed, we are seeing demands from such organisations to relax our current controls on pharmacy contracts and to open up the market much more widely.

In community pharmacies, competitive pressures will continue to require efficiency, economic purchasing, the value-added deployment of staff and sound business decision-making. The provision of quality services that are responsive and directed appropriately to meet local needs and demands will be key to the success of a future community pharmacy business. It has to be about more than prescription numbers, as that is not necessarily the most accurate barometer of pharmaceutical care in rural communities. Indeed, on a general front, remuneration on the basis of prescription volume is quite perverse and encourages waste. Arguably, it is the perversity of that system that has, on the one hand, contributed to the current difficulties and, on the other, is impeding the full expression of pharmaceutical skills to benefit society.

Pharmacists have invested and are investing much time and energy on procurement to achieve profits on the purchase of drugs. Although I want them to use their undoubted clinical skills, for which they have substantial training, to enhance the health of our people and to reward them for applying those skills, I also want and require full transparency in the acquisition of medicines being supplied as part of the health and social care (HSC) service in the same way as I require compliance with my policy on generic prescribing. I have said that future discussions are not primarily about money but about services and access to those services. However, I recognise that money is important and that viability of provision is necessary.

Much has been said about pharmacies closing, and such threats have been at the heart of the pharmacy campaign. Indeed, many patients

and communities have been alarmed by the prospect. We heard a figure of 125 today, but I have seen nothing to sustain that figure. It was said in the House recently that the pharmacy in Rasharkin had closed and that the pharmacy in Dunloy would close also. I can confirm that the Rasharkin pharmacy is open for business. Any pharmacy wishing to close or to remove itself from the pharmaceutical list is legally obliged to give three months' written notification to the HSC board of its intention to do so. However, I have checked with the Business Services Organisation and there have been no applications for closures across Northern Ireland. Indeed, there are four applications to open new pharmacies, with a further 27 applications awaiting decision on appeal. One major retail operator involved in a case against us is looking to open another facility. With that number of appeals, I am concerned that the current arrangements are not working as effectively as they should, and there may be merit in reviewing that as we move forward. We also have large multiples that wish to move into the market.

There has been much talk about pharmacies reducing their opening hours. Pharmacies have to apply to the HSC board if they wish to change their contracted opening hours. Since June 2011, the HSC board has received eight applications from pharmacists to change their contracted hours; five of the applications are to reduce opening hours, and the other three are requests to extend contracted hours. The requests to reduce hours all relate to opening hours at the weekend.

I am conscious that the public is concerned about the potential closure of local pharmacies, given the media coverage of the issue. We have made contingency plans, and the essential small pharmacy scheme is designed to ensure the viability of small pharmacies in key locations, including rural and deprived areas. The terms of that scheme have not been changed. Pharmacies that dispense fewer than 1,300 prescriptions a month, for example, and which are more than one kilometre from the nearest pharmacy, can apply for inclusion in the essential small pharmacy scheme. In addition, the HSC board, as part of its routine business continuity role, continues to monitor the provision of all commissioned health and social care services, including commissioned community pharmacy services.

I have some other matters to address, but my time has almost gone. I would like to clarify that the minor ailments scheme is still available. Anybody who has diarrhoea, head lice, threadworms, vaginal thrush, athlete's foot and fungal infection of the groin can receive the appropriate care and treatment. Members need not worry too much: that service is still available. People with a sore throat or a cold should take some paracetamol or Lemsip — not that I should be advertising — and lie down for a day.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his responses. I think pharmacists might well be looking for funding to expand and to build a consultation room in which to treat some of the minor ailments that he mentioned in his concluding remarks. *[Laughter.]*

I thank Mr McKay for moving the motion and the Members who contributed to the debate. *[Interruption.]* Some Members are still laughing. There was broad support for the motion across the House; there was clear consensus and support for it. It is obvious from listening to local representatives here and to the representatives who had the opportunity to go out to visit local pharmacies that they are very effective.

Mr McKay opened the debate by talking about the impact of the cuts and the crisis point at which pharmacies, particularly in rural areas, find themselves. He said that pharmacists are going over and above the call of duty to help the most vulnerable in rural areas. We heard about the 30% cuts and the devastating impact that they have had across the sector, the job losses and the potential of further job losses. Mr McKay also talked about employees' rights and pay and how they should be protected at this time.

Mr Dunne spoke about the workload within local pharmacies and the jobs and services that they provide. Those services free up a lot of much-needed hospital beds. Some Members talked about the mediboxes that pharmacists provide. Michelle Gildernew and Paula Bradley talked about the valuable service that mediboxes provide, and they mentioned the comfort that the provision of those boxes by pharmacists gives to those who need them most, particularly the elderly. If you talk to carers who look after the elderly, I know that they will tell you that the provision of the mediboxes is a valuable service.

We heard a lot about the pharmacy services and about how effective and efficient they are in trying to do their best, despite the crisis that they are in at the moment because of the cuts. The needs of the smaller pharmacist were also mentioned. Mr Dunne also talked about location-based funding, which is vital at this time.

Mr Gardiner spoke of the possibility of an injection of funding from OFMDFM. That was a core issue for the House, and there was consensus in that regard.

There was talk about transport links and door-to-door delivery and the much-needed services that that provides. That also has an impact on the services that pharmacists have been providing.

The ring-fencing of funding streams is another issue that was discussed across the House. The need to rural proof services such as community pharmacies was also discussed.

Mr Durkan talked about the services that pharmacists provide to our young people, in particular. Usually, young people do not want to go to a doctor to talk about their issues. Local pharmacists are normally the first point of contact for young people, particularly on sexual health and addiction matters, as Mr Durkan said. That is vital, particularly in socially disadvantaged communities. There was a strong emphasis on the need for the services that community pharmacies provide in those areas.

5.00 pm

There was wide acknowledgement across the House of the different methods by which savings can be made. An example was in Castlederg, in my constituency, where Dr Brendan O'Hare made savings of £300,000 in a five-week period by switching patients' medication from branded to generic forms. Support for such measures was evident across the House today.

Mr McCarthy said that we, as public representatives, can play our part in ensuring that vital front line services are protected. The minor ailments scheme was also raised during the debate, and the Minister said that certain elements of that scheme are still available.

Ms Pam Lewis talked about building relationships. She also discussed the integral part that pharmacists play in communities and the many value-for-money services that they provide. There was also wide recognition of the job losses and the broad public support for those whose jobs could be lost.

Michelle Gildernew said that pharmacists were innovative in making changes and providing services to support GPs, including cholesterol and blood pressure checks and advice on healthy lifestyles. Members also talked about local people providing local services. Support for community pharmacies was echoed across the House. All Members who spoke talked about churches, schools and the general public coming out in support of their local pharmacies.

Paula Bradley talked about social interaction by community pharmacists and how vulnerable individuals can remain in their home while services are provided to them. She also spoke about the impact that the withdrawal of the door-to-door service and other services will have on such individuals.

Members also talked about the need to protect pharmacy staff. Members spoke of having been contacted by a large number of staff, particularly those who work in MediCare pharmacies, who are concerned about the cutbacks and the proposals to cut up to 20% from their wages. Those people are qualified pharmacists and employees, and they are seriously concerned about the severity of such cuts and the impact that they will have on their families and households.

Mr Bradley paid tribute to his neighbourhood pharmacist. I must pay tribute to the pharmacists in my home town of Strabane and, in particular, those in the Ballycolman area where I was raised. I will not say what age I am, but I have known my community pharmacist all my life. Indeed, he retired only recently due to ill health. I am sure that it is the same across the House and that all Members will know who their community pharmacists are. There is not a great turnover in the individuals who own community pharmacies.

Members also talked about the introduction of cost-effective measures and switching from branded to generic medication. There are big savings to be made in that area. In general, Members and pharmacists recognise that cuts must be made, and we cannot ignore the impact of those cuts. It is with much regret that pharmacists have had to reduce their services, with 75% of pharmacies having to pay off staff. However, let us not forget about the health and well-being of our pharmacists and the impact

that the cuts have on them. They have made personal sacrifices as a result of defaulting on payments to wholesalers. We recognise that this is an inherited issue, Minister, and we believe that you now have an opportunity to right a wrong and find a solution to it.

What needs to be done? There are 500 community pharmacies across the broad spectrum. Immediate action is needed to make sure that the necessary safeguards are put in place to protect pharmacies that are on the verge of closure, particularly those in rural and deprived areas. There needs to be a co-ordinated approach, based on fair funding, to develop short- and longer-term solutions to ensure that the local community pharmacy network is best placed to meet the changing needs of the population. We need a fair level of funding.

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

Ms Boyle: Yes, OK. Irrespective of what he has said about the funding model, the Minister is not right: if a contingency plan is not put in place, pharmacies will not survive to provide the services that the Minister refers to. Pharmacists manage the drugs budget —

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put a contingency plan in place to protect pharmacy services in rural and socially disadvantaged areas following the introduction of new funding arrangements.*

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the Adjournment topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond and, on this occasion, all other Members who are called to speak will have six minutes.

Mr Craig: I thank the Business Committee for giving us time to debate this matter of serious local concern. Several weeks ago, the children of Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School and their parents felt that they had been dealt an injustice, when the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) notified parents and teachers that it was its intention to close the schools at the end of this academic year. Both proposed closures have devastated the local communities and have left parents and children with very few options. Here we have two schools that are central to the local communities in which they are situated and have served those communities well over their lifetime. Both schools offer a hub for the community through the opening up of their buildings for use by the community outside school hours. The decision to close them therefore comes as a blow not only to the parents, teachers and children but to the community as a whole.

In the weeks prior to this news, parents and children, as well as teachers, listened intently to the Minister of Education's statement on sustainable schools, which was made at the end of September. It is on that policy that the South Eastern Education and Library Board based its decision, and that was detailed in a letter sent out to all parents. Everyone expected that the review of the sustainability of all schools in Northern Ireland would result in closures. Of that, there was no doubt. However, many people were shocked when the SEELB made it known that it would close both Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School prior to the completion of the departmental review. I have

served as a public representative for some 10 years, and I must say that this is the first time that I have seen any arm of any Department act so quickly. The SEELB acted within one week of the Minister's statement to the House. In the eyes of many, the decision is ill informed and misjudged, as well as wholly speculative, since a review of schools is being carried out.

Dunmurry High was recently subjected to a regular inspection that found that standards were not as high as they should be. Under the school improvement policy, Every School a Good School, the procedure for ensuring any improvement in a school is clearly laid out. It states that, if efforts to improve the quality of education are unsuccessful, the policy provides options, including:

> *"restructuring of the governance, leadership and management within the school; merging the school with a neighbouring school; closing the school and re-opening after a period with a new management team",*

and, ultimately:

> *"closure of the school, with pupils transferring to other … schools."*

It should be pointed out that actions such as those are taken on the basis of a school's failure to turn things around after, as the policy states, significant intervention. Dunmurry High has not even been offered the opportunity to implement such action. As with any school that fails an inspection, the school management is required to submit a draft action plan, which is checked by the board and the Department. After that is accepted, the action plan is proposed and checked with the full implementation of the board at the school. The school is then responsible for implementing the plan and is permitted up to 18 months to do so, with checks conducted by the board every three months. It should be pointed out that the board never checked how things were going at Dunmurry, and, given that the action plan was submitted and accepted in May and June this year, the school was not granted anywhere near 18 months to see its implementation. Therefore, it was never given the chance to prove itself.

I want to highlight other, unique information about the South Eastern Education and Library Board. Unlike any other education and library board in the Province, the SEELB is run by a group of highly paid commissioners, some of whom fly over every month to take meetings. The board has been run by commissioners, without any political input, for a considerable time. The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 paved the way for the establishment of education and library boards. ELBs were established following a review of local government and were intended to provide local democracy and fair representation of the community in all aspects of local government. Under the 1986 Order, a newly constituted ELB should have been appointed in 2009, regardless of the previous position. I am reliably informed that the Department has, therefore, failed to discharge its legal obligation to appoint an ELB under paragraph 1 of schedule 2 to the 1986 Order. That is one issue on which I would most certainly like the Minister's opinion.

I now want to discuss some of the benefits and details of the schools in question. Dunmurry High caters for more children from the Village and Sandy Row areas of south Belfast than from Seymour Hill, where it is based and which is one of the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland. Of the 220 children enrolled at the school prior to the announcement, 60% were from south Belfast. Many of those children had moved school once or twice in their educational career so far, all down to closures in the south Belfast area. They were left with few school options, and Dunmurry High happened to serve their needs. One has to wonder what the impact of yet another closure will be on the lives of those children. Furthermore, 71 of those children are catered for through the nurture and special needs classes that are run at the school by dedicated teaching staff. Many of the children have special needs and would not elsewhere get the care and support that they require. The Minister knows that routine is central for children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and that change is not good for them. Consequently, by closing this school, the board risks upsetting the education of those children and turning their entire life upside down.

The board pointed out in communication to the parents that 959 places were available to their children at neighbouring schools. Of course, it should be pointed out that the word "neighbouring" is not one that anyone would use to describe many of those schools. Most are situated in east Belfast, up to 10 miles away from Dunmurry High School. That is the irony. Many children will be required to get not

just one bus but several in order to get to one of those other schools.

5.15 pm

I now turn to the other school in question, Knockmore Primary School. It is home to 143 pupils, 62 of whom have special educational needs. There are four speech and language units, which accommodate 44 children, and three social communication units, which accommodate 18 children diagnosed with ASD. The school is well known for the support that it offers to children with special needs and their parents. I believe that the only reason why the board is closing the school is to split the special needs unit from the mainstream school. However, that seems to be going against departmental policy. Will the Minister advise the House whether that is legal and, more important, whether the board is breaking departmental policy?

The closure of Knockmore Primary School will leave a void in the area. Few choices remain as to where those children with special educational needs will go. Where will they receive the pastoral care that they received at the school? There is a belief that the closure has been planned for some time, because at present there is an acting principal, an acting vice-principal, three mainstream teaching staff on temporary contracts, one unit teacher on a temporary contract, one unit teacher on a substitute basis to cover the acting head, a building supervisor on a temporary contract and one temporary outreach support teacher. Although some may deny that fact, it has all the hallmarks of closure, and the Minister's statement in September provided the excuse for such a closure.

Many people view these closures as an attack on the controlled education sector. The huge area that Dunmurry High School serves will be left without a controlled or state-provided school. They are also viewed as an attack on schools that facilitate special needs children, which applies to Knockmore Primary School and Dunmurry High School. There are genuine fears about where the children will go. As chairman of the board of governors at Laurelhill Community College — I declare an interest in that regard — I can say with confidence that it provides for children with special educational needs, but it does so for those in year 8 only, and the same is true for other schools in the locality. So, where are the rest of those special needs children supposed to go? That is a key question for the Minister to answer, in addition to the others that I have outlined, and I, for one, look forward to hearing his response.

The most disappointing thing is that Knockmore Primary School is a good and viable school. It has excelled despite the pressure that the board has placed on it by putting everyone at the school on a temporary contract. Exactly one year ago, the school came out with excellent results following an inspection. Given the criteria outlined by the Minister, one has to ask why this school been targeted. Why is the special needs unit being separated from the mainstream school when, in truth, according to what the teachers and parents have to say, both are integral? Children who get proper teaching in the special needs unit move formally into the mainstream school. I thought that the Department approved of that situation. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The topic of the debate affects a wide number of constituents and Members. Several Members have indicated that they wish to speak. Therefore, I have decided to make an adjustment. Remaining Members will have five minutes in which to speak in order to accommodate everyone who has shown an interest. Members have five minutes from now on.

Mr B McCrea: Due to the comprehensive nature of the remarks by the proposer of the Adjournment debate, five minutes will be sufficient for me to add emphasis to some of the points that he raised. He has outlined the details with remarkable clarity.

At the outset, I want to say that I understand the Minister of Education's argument about the number of empty places in schools and the need to identify a way to address those issues. Therefore, I am a little reluctant to come forward with a knee-jerk reaction and say that we must see what we can do to stop the closure of these two schools. We need to look at the issues in the round. Having made that caveat, however, and having been to the schools recently, I am astonished about the way in which matters are being handled. I cannot believe that the schools fall into any regime that would merit closure.

At the start of the debate, Mr Craig mentioned that the education and library board seemed to be moving with undue haste. That may or may not be because of its management structure.

It certainly appears to offer a certain amount of contempt for political representatives and people who are trying to respond to the situation properly. I do not use the word "contempt" lightly. Frankly, I am astonished at the speed at which it is moving.

I will deal with the schools in the opposite order. Knockmore Primary School is a school that is actually working. It has the support of parents. It brings in people from a wide range of areas. It is viable. It has excellent inspection reports. There does not seem to be any just cause for its closure. Perhaps, it is because it does not fit in with a mainstream policy or one that says that people should be moved to schools in different areas. I cannot work out why anybody would target that school.

I am also disturbed about the parallel way in which the board is looking at things; that is to say, trying to separate the special education element of the school from what might be called the mainstream school. One really good feature of the school is how all of its pupils are integrated in a nurturing environment. That is a better policy than trying to shoehorn pupils into different places.

I am really surprised by what is happening. I will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say. Although I have to go and do something else, I will be listening to his response. I cannot believe that that school, with all of its success, is being highlighted in this way. I have advised it that it should look at legal issues on the matter.

I have also had the benefit of going to see Dunmurry High School, although not just as recently, perhaps, as I visited Knockmore Primary School. I had a series of Assembly outreach engagements with pupils of that school. They have visited Parliament Buildings. I found the school and the people who are involved with it to be excellent. It is a school that seems to be central to its area. I believe that Mr Craig outlined that, if that school closes, there will not be a huge number of places in the vicinity due to the geographical spread of schools in the area. I understand when inspections are carried out. Other schools, such as Lisnagarvey High School, were also inspected and required some investigation. However, schools that deal with such areas deserve the Assembly's support. Frankly, I am surprised that this school has been singled out as well.

I see that time is moving on, and I want to finish with a direct question to the Minister on two points that have arisen but particularly to do with Knockmore. It seems to me that children at that school get a particularly good form of education and support, and I wonder about the legality of removing them, if that school were to close, to nominally similar types of education system that are not as integrated or as good a system as possible. I think that there is a legal issue in that.

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

Mr B McCrea: The Minister might clarify whether he can remove provision from children without making sure that there is the same standard elsewhere.

Mr Lunn: I am glad that Jonathan Craig secured the debate. There is certainly widespread dismay among the parents, pupils and staff of both schools. I am also glad that he took some time to lay out the process for improvement, which the Department does not seem to have followed very rigidly.

Following the Minister's statement of 26 September and his announcement of a viability audit of all schools, which I welcomed and continue to welcome, I was surprised to see that the South Eastern Education and Library Board was going to proceed with its proposals for a development plan. That seems to fly in the face of logic. What is the point? If those schools are to close, it will not happen before next September, and the viability audit will be complete by then. The criteria for the South Eastern Board's deliberations and those for the viability audit are not the same. For a start, on area-based planning, the Minister has made a big thing of the fact that CCMS is to be involved in the viability audits on an area basis. No account has been taken of that. I am not sure what effect that would have on either school, but it is a fact that that has not been taken into account. It is completely premature to take the proposed actions in advance of an announced and very welcome viability audit.

I turn to Knockmore Primary School first. I looked at the six criteria listed in the sustainable schools policy and compared them to what goes on at Knockmore. The first is, obviously, a quality educational experience. As Jonathan said, Knockmore had an excellent inspection report just last year.

Attendance at the school is above the Northern Ireland average. In particular, as the first two contributors mentioned, it has a really terrific and highly acclaimed unit for special educational needs. I wonder whether anywhere in the country has a better record than that unit. It is universally regarded as an exemplar for how to integrate children into the mainstream. I declare an interest in that my brother's granddaughter recently completed her attendance there, and it was marvellously beneficial to her.

Knockmore's stable enrolment trend is another big factor. Its enrolment is above the threshold and has been for the past three years. I noticed in the development proposal that the South Eastern Board lays out the figures for the past 10 years. The viability audit will refer only to the past three years, when the figures have gone up, gently, to about 159. I know that Jonathan Craig mentioned a different figure, but I am going by the figures that the South Eastern Board has provided. I understand that that figure may have dropped slightly in the past few days because these situations can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is annoying to see a good school brought down by rumour, and I hope that that will not happen. Knockmore is a terrific school, and it has a relatively sound financial position, which is another criterion of the sustainable schools policy. It has good accessibility and strong links with the community.

It is in the centre of a housing estate and draws most of its pupils from that area. As other Members asked: why is Knockmore in the firing line for closure? It does not make sense.

5.30 pm

I fear that it might be a bit more difficult to make a case for Dunmurry High School. It is well below the numbers threshold, its enrolment trend is not going in the right direction, and if you take the figures that the South Eastern Board has produced, how on earth a school can go from a surplus to a projected deficit of £700,000 in three years' time is a bit of a mystery to me.

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

Mr Lunn: Nevertheless, it is premature to look at a school such as Dunmurry High School. Where are the pupils supposed to go, Mr Deputy Speaker? I know that you are in a hurry. One of the other schools that was listed was Orangefield, which has 510 vacancies —

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

Mr Lunn: — but it makes no sense to send children from Dunmurry to Orangefield.

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

Mr Givan: I thank my colleague Mr Craig for securing the debate and for giving us an opportunity to highlight these issues. During Question Time, the Minister expressed his view on the issues and, no doubt, he will repeat it when he gets the opportunity. However, I assure the Minister that the issue is being led by the grassroots from both schools, and we are responding to that. It is not being led by the political representatives of the area. Indeed, if the parents of the schools did not want a campaign to raise this issue publicly, this debate would not have happened. Therefore, we are responding to the campaign that the parents have been running, which has brought the issue to public attention.

I want to touch on Knockmore Primary School in the first instance. The development proposal was put out, and immediately after a very unsatisfactory meeting, the response from the education board was very poor. There were no responses to parents' concerns. I sit on the boards of governors of two primary schools in Lisburn whose principals were getting phone calls from parents who wanted to get their children into those schools. How that process was handled by the education board, the manner in which the meeting was conducted and the fact that the development proposal was rubber-stamped by the commissioners within four days of the initial meeting have exacerbated the problem.

Knockmore Primary School received a good report when it was inspected exactly 12 months ago. It is not a failing school academically; it is delivering. There is frustration from Members who represent the constituency that a school that has been inspected and which is deemed to be delivering high-quality education has not even been given the opportunity to be included in the Minister's audit review, and has been put out in the manner in which it has been put out for this development proposal by the education board.

As other Members said, the particular advantage of the school is the specialist units attached to it. There are 62 children in the specialist units, 44 of whom are from the speech and language

unit. Some of those children have already been moved from the ICAN facility, which was closed because the then Education Minister did not provide the funding that the Health Department had been providing and had offered to continue providing, only the then Education Minister pulled the plug. Some of those children were moved to Knockmore Primary School, and now they are faced with the scenario that they may have to be moved again.

It is not just children behind the statistics; it is children with special educational needs. They are the most vulnerable children in the education system. I know that the Minister will have to look at the proposals when they arrive on his desk, but I implore him to interrogate seriously all the evidence that is put before him and to ask himself whether the way in which this issue has been taken forward is right and whether it is right for those children to be subjected to such treatment and moved again. The evidence has shown that 80% of children who are placed in the special language unit from entry in P1 go into mainstream education. It is successful, it works and it is delivering. People need to be very careful about breaking up a system that is delivering.

I am concerned about why Knockmore Primary School has been singled out. There are a number of urban schools in the general locality in Lisburn. I can immediately think of three others that are within a one-mile radius of Knockmore. Why is there not a comprehensive review of all primary schools in that small section of Lisburn? The education standards and teaching in those schools could be looked at and a decision taken on the best way forward. Knockmore Primary School has been singled out wrongly by the education board.

I will conclude on this point, because I know that my time is running out. Why are the commissioners still in place in the South Eastern Education and Library Board? Why are we being discriminated against in a way that no other education and library board area is being treated, with unelected and unaccountable commissioners taking these types of decisions?

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

Mr Givan: I implore the Education Minister to address the discrimination against those communities in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area.

Mr Poots: I commend Mr Craig for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. There are two issues before us today, the first of which is Dunmurry High School. I recognise that it is a failing school. Why? Why has it been allowed to fail? If there has been a leadership problem — and I believe that there has been a leadership problem — why was it allowed to continue?

The education and library board and the Department have questions to answer because, as a consequence, many children living in deprived communities in South Belfast and Lagan Valley will be deprived of a local education service. That is deeply unfortunate and grossly unfair. The education and library board had a serious role to play if it knew that that school was failing, and it did know that. It did not step in to ensure that the appropriate leadership was put in place to allow that school to progress.

Knockmore Primary School is a different case. The South Eastern Education and Library Board has acted wholly inappropriately and done great violence to a good school. The school was meeting standards and did not fall below the thresholds set out by the Minister a few weeks ago. I actually agree with those thresholds, but Knockmore Primary School did not fall below the thresholds in respect of either numbers or the return given to pupils. Indeed, 80% of the children who attended the speech and language unit went on to attend mainstream school.

It is very important to give children, particularly when they are young, the opportunity to overcome their disabilities and engage in a normal school life without sitting for years and being held back by a disability. Early intervention can ensure that they have a full education. It is incumbent on the Minister to intervene in this case to ensure that the children at Knockmore Primary School get a chance.

The equality requirements of section 75 have not been adhered to. We are looking at youngsters with a disability, but the education and library board seems to have just written off that fact. It feels that it can disperse those children even though a quality education has been offered to them. The matter needs to be looked at and addressed again.

I do not know what discussions took place with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. I sincerely hope that full negotiations took place beforehand. It is a matter of concern that two-and-a-half members of staff in that school are

employees of the trust and provide a key health-related service to children with a disability. If the commissioners and the education and library board are allowed to proceed with this action without having proper discussions and negotiations, that is a major failing.

I agree with the Members who discussed the issue of the commissioners. There is no democratic accountability, and that will be taken into account if this matter comes to a judicial review. The commissioners, as established, do not have legal authority.

Secondly, when we were in the direct rule period, the fact that public ownership was not a major factor at that point was the key to judicial reviews being granted quite easily and being overturned quite easily. If we have commissioners — who are appointed at £500 a day, I remind the House — as opposed to people who have a legitimate right to be there under the Order to advocate and to deal with issues relating to our children and young people, including people who hold publicly elected positions, it would be a different matter.

The Minister should give serious consideration to how the decision has been arrived at. The way that Knockmore Primary School has been dealt with, in particular, has been wholly inappropriate, and as a consequence of their behaviour on this matter, great violence has been done to it and to children with disabilities.

Mr McDevitt: I rise to briefly add my voice to those of colleagues expressing concern at the situation that both these schools find themselves in. I have a direct constituency interest in Dunmurry High, as — as Mr McCrea, Mr Poots and Mr Givan have already noted — a significant proportion of the pupil intake of that school comes from inner South Belfast, a community that is increasingly being dispersed in relation to its second-level education provision and which really no longer has a school or a couple of schools that it can look to as its own. That is neither in the interests of the community nor of the schools that those young people attend.

It is a simple fact that the vast majority of young men and women growing up in the Village and Sandy Row areas of my constituency are travelling extraordinary distances to attend second-level education. That is not fair on them or their families, and it is certainly not strengthening their community or assisting it with the transition that so many of its leaders are trying to make from where that community would have been in past decades to where it needs to be.

The situation in Knockmore is quite depressing, frankly. It seems illogical to me that we, as an Executive, would not take the opportunity to include a school such as Knockmore in the viability audit process. I appeal to the Minister, even at this stage, to make such arrangements as could be necessary in order to do so.

I do not really want to say much else, except to apologise to the House, because I have to leave to speak elsewhere in a few seconds, and to say to the Minister that, in the process of developing his area-planning strategies, it is communities such as those in the Village and Sandy Row in South Belfast — and, indeed, in the south and south-east inner city areas — that he could well bear in mind. The reality of the past decade has been that, for those communities, educational provision has been pushed further and further away from them, and the choices available to those children have become fewer and fewer.

Mr McGimpsey: I rise as a representative of South Belfast to echo and reiterate the concerns that exist among families in inner South Belfast in particular, in areas such as Sandy Row, Donegall Pass, the Village and the Donegall Road. Those are some of the most disadvantaged communities anywhere in Northern Ireland — communities for which education for their children is of paramount importance to allow those children to progress through life with any sort of opportunity to gain job opportunities and to ensure their quality of life as they grow old.

We have been here before. We had a new school called Balmoral High built on Blacks Road by the Belfast Education and Library Board, supported by the Department. That lasted merely a few years, and then it was closed, and all the pupils who were there had to move on. They moved on to, among other schools, Dunmurry High, and here we go again. Once again, it does not seem to matter where it is, pupils coming from those disadvantaged communities are being let down. It marches very much with the situation of the new consolidated primary school planned and proposed for inner South Belfast. Again, we have three primary schools — Fane Street Primary School, Blythefield Primary School on Sandy Row and Donegall Road Primary School

— all of which are around 100 years old and fit for demolition. There is agreement in those communities that those schools will come together in a consolidated primary school. Once again on that issue we have met a stone wall, despite the fact that the Belfast Trust has offered up a site at the Belfast City Hospital to allow that consolidation to proceed.

5.45 pm

If we are going to let our pupils down in that way, where are the pupils from those areas supposed to go to school? We are being told that, because they are in Belfast, they should go to the Boys' Model School in north Belfast. That is a very difficult journey to make. It is the closest controlled school, as I understand it, but it is full, and there is no room, so the pupils are told to go to east Belfast. It seems to me that there is a lack of will in the South Eastern Board and, indeed, in the Department, to give provision for those pupils in schools that are, at least, in their locality. That is a serious mistake.

When we get a school, of course, the word goes out that it is under threat. Parents start to take their children away, the numbers go down and critical mass is lost. Educational attainment standards go down as well as we run into composite classes, and so on, and we end up with a failing school. That is what happened at Balmoral High School, which was a multi-million-pound new development. How bad was the planning for that? It was a multi-million-pound new development, but the Department allowed it to close because it did not provide the support to the Belfast Education and Library Board that it should have provided to allow that school to go forward. *[Interruption.]*

It may be a matter of some —

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): That is a good story you are telling.

Mr McGimpsey: It may be a matter of some amusement to you, Mr O'Dowd, because, of course, your party was in charge of the Department at that time. I can tell you that parents are asking me where they should go and what they should do. The cost of travel is a difficulty. Many children from poor families have to pay £2·50 each a day to get to Dunmurry because they do not get a subsidy. If they were attending Malone College, the local integrated secondary school, they would travel for free. It may be that they want to go there, and many do, but many do not. There is an inequality there; if you go to the integrated school, you get your bus pass, but if you do not, you will not get one. That needs to be addressed.

I am disappointed that we are in a situation in inner South Belfast where, once again, a secondary school that is providing education for a number of our pupils is being shut. We are being told to go to the Boys' Model School in north Belfast or to east Belfast, or to Newtownbreda High School, which is also heavily oversubscribed. That is not the type of provision or support that children from families who need it so desperately are entitled to and which they merit and should be getting.

Mr Storey: I commend my colleague Jonathan Craig for securing the Adjournment debate on this issue. I support him, because what is being played out in relation to Dunmurry and Knockmore is probably not dissimilar to what we are going to see over the next number of years. As Mr Lunn said earlier, we need to be very careful. Whenever there are rumours or assertions that things are going to take place, as other Members for Lagan Valley have mentioned, what is already happening is like the proverbial snow from a ditch. It feeds a crisis of confidence among parents in the locality.

There are a number of generic things that I want to raise in relation to the way in which we have come to the decision that has been made on these two schools. I commend the Member who proposed the Adjournment topic for the detail that he gave. He set out very clearly the issues in relation to Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School. The significant intervention powers that exist in education Orders have not been fully implemented or used to the full extent in regard to Dunmurry High School. That is worrying. It is something that we need to further progress and discuss with the board and the Department.

That leads me to the issue of the South Eastern Education and Library Board. It has been raised at the Committee for Education, and the Department has responded. I know that the Minister will say that he is confident that the commissioners have the legal power to do what they are doing. However, it is an absolute disgrace that, in 2011, an area of Northern Ireland has been governed by commissioners since 2006. I ask the Minister to seriously consider that issue. There has been an over-

reliance on the powers of article 101 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Those powers were invoked in 2006 for a specific reason; it was not to give general powers and duties to commissioners to take decisions like those that they have taken. I urge the Minister to take seriously the concerns that are right across the piece in that regard.

We then come to the Minister's announcement about a viability audit. Many people are concerned about what the outcome of that audit will be. When the Minister stood in the House on 26 September 2011, I think that we were all under the impression that that audit was particularly for the post-primary sector. The terms of reference of the audit show that it will involve primary and post-primary schools. That has a significant bearing on Knockmore Primary School and Dunmurry High School because they fall within the remit of that review. The Minister is looking for the review to be back by March of next year, so I wonder whether there is sufficient time to collate all the relevant information.

The other issue that I want to raise with the Minister is about the controlled sector. Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School are in the controlled sector. For too long, that sector has been the Cinderella of education in many regards. It is seen by many as always having to take second place. There are issues in working-class Protestant areas. We have seen those in Dawn Purvis's report and in work that was carried out for other reports at other times. Dunmurry, in particular, is a working-class Protestant area, and we have heard the comments that were made by Members for South Belfast. That issue needs to be addressed —

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

Mr Storey: — in a way that deals with reality, not by simply saying that it is unfortunate that another controlled school is closing but we just have to move on. I ask the Minister to take those points into consideration when he responds this evening.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to debate this issue. I regret that I have only 10 minutes in which to speak, because the issues that have been raised here today deserve longer than 10 minutes.

I am familiar with Dunmurry High School. I was appointed as Minister of Education by the deputy First Minister, and I was in post for 15 minutes when a Member brought Dunmurry High School to my attention. What was the advice from that Member? Unfortunately, I cannot reveal that advice because I am in a legal position in which I will be signing off on any decision about Dunmurry High School. However, if I had taken that Member's advice, we would not be having this debate; the decision would have been made a long time ago. However, there is a legal process in place. No decision has been made. If the development proposals come forward to me, they will be in a legal process. I will take on board all the information that is in front of me, and I will make my decision based on those figures.

I said earlier during Question Time that I regret that these sorts of debates come to the Chamber, because you almost have to let out the family secrets. You have to lay them bare for everyone to hear, and let me lay out for Members a few bare facts about Dunmurry High School. I will lay out the facts because they are facts and because they are part, but only part, of the information that I will have to assess when coming to a decision. Dunmurry High School is a controlled school whose enrolments have continued to decline from 326 in 2006-07 to 266 in 2010-11. The school has an approved enrolment of 400, so there are 134 unfilled places.

If only that were the full story. In March, Dunmurry High School entered the formal intervention programme, because the quality of its educational provision, educational attainment, leadership and management was inadequate. That is the school that Members are defending. In 2009-2010, only 15% achieved five-plus GCSEs or equivalent at grades A to C — the overall average was 59%. The number who achieved five-plus GCSEs, including English and maths, was zero. I will repeat that for Members: the number who achieved five-plus GCSEs, including English and maths, was zero.

Mr Craig tells me that the Department and the education boards are attacking the controlled sector. Respectfully, I put it to the Member that the pupils in Dunmurry High have been under attack for a very long time. Indeed, they have been under the full bombardment of poor educational attainment and provision, and, during that period, not one Member thought it worth his or her while to come to the Chamber

to seek a debate on what we should do about educational provision in schools that are failing young people. The problems did not start only last year. Much mention has been made of the SEELB's undemocratic decisions. The SEELB was stood down in 2006, and in 2006-07, fewer than five pupils out of a cohort of 76 achieved five-plus GCSEs at grades A to C. In 2007-08, the figure was 8% out of 60, which equates to about five pupils. In 2008-09, the figure was 10% out of 60.

With respect to Members, the issue of provision in Dunmurry has long passed. The question is what we will do about provision in Dunmurry. Defending it blindly will not do; defending it because it is a building in South Belfast, or wherever it may be, will not do. Members have a responsibility to lead in their communities. I can understand parents and community leaders coming forward to demand that Dunmurry High School be retained, but I respectfully say to Members: go to those meetings well informed. The latest Education and Training Inspectorate report is a public document and is available. I suggest that you sit down and read it, and then come back to the House to defend the failings at Dunmurry High School.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: No, I will not.

I respect the fact that Mr Poots spoke from the Back Benches and is not here as the Health Minister, but let me put a scenario to him. If Mr Poots received information about unsafe health provision, as I have about unsafe educational provision, he would demand action. As Education Minister, I demand action when I have information about unsafe educational provision. The failings in the education service will end up at Mr Poots's door as failings in the health service. Those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have ill health, no jobs and no prospects. When I come to make a decision on Dunmurry High School, I will make it on the basis of all the information in front of me, not simply the exam results, which are deplorable. I will make it based on all the information that the development proposals bring. If the proposals contain new information or innovative ideas, I will examine those closely.

The SEELB has legal authority. Mr Craig told me that he was reliably informed that it does not, but only a judge can reliably inform me, as a Minister, of that. As far as I am concerned, and based on the legal advice that I have, the SEELB has legal authority. I also wish to see the end of commissioners in the South Eastern Education and Library Board. I want a democratic structure for education, and I believe that we can and will achieve that. Let us keep our focus on that and move towards that objective. The democratic accountability in all these matters rests with me as Minister. I am the person who will sign off on development proposals for Dunmurry or any other school. There is democratic accountability at the heart of government to the Executive, Assembly and Executive Committee.

6.00 pm

Quite frankly, it was a mistake to bring Knockmore Primary School and Dunmurry High School in on the same debate. However, I respect the right of Members to do that. There are two different issues. Each was examined by the board around bringing forward development proposals but they are two unique and different issues.

Again, no decision has been made on Knockmore. I will look at all the information provided to me on Knockmore. I listened to the comments of Members this evening, and I have no doubt that I will receive more comments as the process goes on. However, I think it was a mistake to bring both schools forward together. In my own mind, however, I have separated them, and I will, as with all development proposals, be able to make a decision on the basis of the development proposal.

Mr Storey is quite correct about the viability audit being brought forward. It was originally planned for post-primary provision. However, after listening to the debate in the Chamber, and comments from Members and educationalists, I thought it was quite right and proper to include primary schools in the audit. For once, you could maybe say that a Minister has listened. I believe that all those matters can be delivered in the time ahead. I want the viability audit back with me by December. If development proposals come forward for Knockmore and Dunmurry, they will be in that time frame.

However, I cannot turn round to our managing authorities or the CCMS and say, "Stop. Hold any information you have in front of you that would raise concern about a school, and stop right away." I would much prefer that they come forward with those proposals and they can be dealt with in the round.

Let us be clear: there are schools out there that are failing our young people. You can say that we should have intervened six years ago or five years ago. At one stage in the debate, the board and Department were criticised for acting too quickly, and at another stage, we were criticised for acting too late. I think that we acted too late. One reason why I brought forward my September statement was to say to the managing authorities that we cannot delay these decisions any longer. We cannot allow children to be failed in our schools.

The information is there. The boards and CCMS are aware of it. If they believe that bringing forward a development proposal ahead of the audit is the right thing to do, I will allow that process to continue.

I know that it is difficult for MLAs. I know that it is difficult for elected representatives dealing with these matters. However, I appeal to you to go informed to meetings with parents and representatives. My Department will make available to anyone any relevant information that can be put into the public domain about any school coming forward because I want an informed debate out there. I want Members to be able to go into their communities to offer leadership on these issues. However, I appeal to Members not to defend the indefensible, regardless of how it arrived or happened. Do not defend the indefensible. There are schools in our system that need to be taken out of it for the benefit of the young people contained within them.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. During Mr Craig's speech, a Member violated something that the Speaker said should not happen, namely, he walked across the area between you and the person who was addressing you. I ask you to pass that on to the Speaker to have a look at.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will ensure that that happens.

Adjourned at 6.04 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 7 November 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: I have received a letter from the deputy First Minister revoking with effect from 31 October 2011 his earlier letter, in which he had designated the Minister of Education to exercise the functions of the office of deputy First Minister.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Roads and Transport

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make a statement on the eleventh meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in transport sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Friday 21 October 2011. I attended the meeting with the Minister of the Environment, Alex Attwood MLA, who will make a separate statement on road safety issues directly after my statement and the question and answer session. The meeting was chaired by Minister Varadkar TD, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

The Council discussed progress on the A5 and A8 road projects. Ministers noted that public inquiries into the A5 north-west gateway to Aughnacloy and the A8 Belfast to Larne projects ended on 1 July 2011 and 23 June 2011 respectively. The Council also noted that the cross-border steering group has produced an agreed report and that, subject to final approval at the North/South Ministerial Council plenary sitting, a further request for drawdown of £3 million will be made.

The Council discussed progress made on the five priority areas of the All Island Freight Forum (AIFF), which were meetings with the relevant regional and local authorities, including Dublin City Council and Belfast City Council, about more sustainable freight transport operations in Dublin and Belfast; an event involving 50 delegates — I wish that there had been only 49 — from public bodies and industry, from which key issues relating to a safer, more compliant and eco-efficient road freight industry were identified; a meeting of representatives of ports,

railway companies, shipping lines and exporters to explore further the potential of rail freight and coastal trade and short sea shipping; the establishment of a comprehensive baseline in relation to international connectivity on all regular scheduled roll-on/roll-off (ro-ro) and lift-on/lift-off (lo-lo) services and identification of key industry clusters; and a review of existing freight data for Northern Ireland and Ireland and a related user consultation and stakeholder workshop, which was held in Dublin Castle on 5 October, to identify potential information gaps. Ministers noted that the freight forum will hold a second plenary event on 7 November 2011 — today — in Belfast to address issues that are relevant to the freight sector.

Mr Spratt (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I thank the Minister for his statement. I appreciate that he is, perhaps, restricted in what he can say regarding the A5, as he awaits the inspector's report on the public inquiry. However, he said that the Council discussed the A5 proposal, and he advised when he hopes to receive the inspector's report and when he would expect to make a decision regarding the proposal. Will he also advise what the agreed report referred to in his statement was on and what conclusion it arrived at? Finally, will the Minister advise the House whether the authorities in the Republic of Ireland have confirmed that finances will be available for the proposal, and, if so, will he advise on the timing for drawing down those moneys?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee for his questions and for his ongoing contribution. The Member is right in saying that the A5 and the A8 schemes were discussed at the sectoral meeting in Armagh. As I indicated in my statement, we noted that the cross-border steering group produced an agreed report. A plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council is due later this month, when we will seek approval for a further request for the drawdown of £3 million towards the scheme. As the Member will be aware, the A5 and the A8 schemes are being taken forward as the result of an agreement between both Governments to upgrade the two key transport corridors. Those projects will greatly facilitate economic growth and provide good value for money to the people of Northern Ireland.

I had previously indicated that, when I receive the inspector's report and recommendations, I will consider spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the strategic roads programme. I am limited in what I can say, particularly in respect of the A5 inspector's report, given that it has not been received by my Department. We expect it to be presented some time before Christmas, and I will take early consideration of it. The A8 report has been received and is being considered by departmental officials. I will attempt to bring forward a view on that as quickly as possible.

The Member will know that there is ongoing speculation as to the overall economic situation in the Republic of Ireland. No firm conclusions have been indicated yet by the Irish Government in respect of their funding.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. My question regarding the A5 has already been asked by the Member opposite and has been answered by the Minister.

Mr Kennedy: The Member has got two for one, Mr Speaker.

Mr Beggs: The Minister indicated that there was a discussion about rail freight and about the benefits that can flow from it. Is the Minister aware that the port of Larne is one of the few ports within which there is a railhead? Does he believe that, as a result of the discussions, there is potential for growth in that port and in the importance of the Larne-Belfast railway line?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Given that he represents East Antrim, I would, of course, expect him to be very supportive of Larne port and to encourage its use. Whether anything can be explored with rail freight is worthy of some consideration from a departmental point of view and on a North/South basis. The general view hitherto has been that there is insufficient opportunity for freight to be moved by rail across the island of Ireland, and I am certainly content to explore any possibilities that may exist for improved lines and facilities.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his statement. As other Members indicated, he answered the question on the A5 project to the best of his ability. I will pursue the matter that Mr Beggs raised about the use of the railways for freight. There are immense opportunities to improve the impact of freight on the

environment by getting it off our roads and on to rail. Will the Minister indicate that he will at least explore discussions with Northern Ireland Railways and CIE to see what advantages could be created between the port of Larne and the port of Dublin?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful that, even with my limited ability, the Member was able to find an elucidating answer to the previous question. I am happy to explore opportunities for rail and rail freight. At the very early stage, there will, perhaps, be challenging issues in bringing forward proposals, but I am happy and content to explore those opportunities.

Lord Morrow: I too thank the Minister for his statement, albeit that it was a bit woolly and indecisive. I want to ask him about the A5. At the time of the election, the Minister's party made much ado and play about the fact that it was opposed to the A5 project. I do not want to misquote him, but I think that he said today that there was no firm indication from the Irish Republic Government on the £400 million that they intended making available. That seems to be a change: I thought that there was a firm commitment from the Irish Republic Government that they were prepared to put £400 million into the project. I know that that sum was, perhaps, committed before the crisis. However, can the Minister be a wee bit more explicit and tell us whether he is in favour of the scheme and when exactly we can expect the inspector's report on the public inquiry?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question, which was, as usual, robust. Of course, the Member has kept his own record in place in that he did not indicate his view or his party's view on the A5 project, yet he would like me to do so. Today's statement obviously relates to the North/South ministerial sectoral meeting, and I have reported accurately the situation on what the discussions on the A5 and the A8 brought forward. It is not a state secret: even Lord Morrow will be aware that there are significant economic pressures in the Irish Republic and that, at this point, we are simply awaiting the outcome of deliberations there.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister elaborate on the establishment of the comprehensive baseline for the international connectivity on all regular ro-ro and lo-lo services and on the identification of key industry clusters?

12.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: It may be the acoustics in the House, but I did not quite catch the question. I apologise to the Member for that.

Mr Speaker: Perhaps the Member will repeat what he was saying.

Mr Ó hOisín: I was looking for elaboration of the:

> *"comprehensive baseline in relation to international connectivity"*

which the Minister referred to in his statement.

Mr Kennedy: The All-Ireland Freight Forum has five priority issues — I referred to this in the statement — including the establishment of that comprehensive baseline in relation to international connectivity. I will attempt to get the Member further information on that to see what the present situation is.

North/South Ministerial Council: Road Safety

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the eleventh meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in the transport sector, which was held in Armagh on Friday 21 October.

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

As Minister Kennedy indicated, the meeting was chaired by Minister Varadkar TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, and it was attended by me and the Regional Development Minister, who has addressed the areas that fall within his ministerial remit. The Council's agenda also included items for which my Department has responsibility: road safety and the mutual recognition of penalty points.

The Council noted that the Northern Ireland road safety strategy to 2020 was published on 15 March 2011, and we discussed the continuing co-operation and engagement on road safety ideas and initiatives, including the delivery of road safety strategies and developments in harmonising blood:alcohol concentration levels. I outlined to Minister Varadkar my plans for introducing a package of measures to tackle drink-driving and how I see merit in having an all-island approach to drink-drive limits. I welcome in particular — I have issued a statement to this effect — the introduction of new, lower blood:alcohol limits in the South which came into effect on 28 October and which reflect and comply with a lot of European best practice.

Ministers also noted the ongoing work in both jurisdictions to assess the impact of the UK Government's proposed heavy goods vehicle charging scheme and welcomed the continuation of joint intelligence-led targeted operations in border areas for 2011 that focus on vehicle standards, licensing and drivers' hours. During the meeting, it was noted that sharing a border with another jurisdiction on the island of Ireland puts us in a different situation to the jurisdictions in Britain with respect to the heavy goods vehicle charging scheme.

Ministers also noted that officials, learning from the experience of mutual recognition of disqualification, will work together to bring forward proposals for the introduction of mutual recognition of penalty points between Northern Ireland and Ireland for four lesser but nonetheless very serious road traffic infringements, namely speeding, drink- or drug-driving, the failure to use seat belts and the use of a mobile phone while driving. A timetable for delivery and implementation will be prepared with the aim of having the necessary legislation and supporting administrative arrangements in place by 2014. That is a long lead-in time, but I am satisfied that it is necessary. A progress report will be made at the next NSMC transport meeting, which we agreed would be held in March or April 2012.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for his statement. The Minister recently announced his intention to lower blood:alcohol limits in Northern Ireland to, in effect, zero. The Republic of Ireland has gone down to that limit, and there will obviously be a disparity and a difference for a short period. How does the Minister intend to communicate that difference more widely to drivers in Northern Ireland, so that they are not operating under the misconception that the old system is still in place in the Irish Republic?

Mr Attwood: I thank Mr Hamilton for his question. To create certainty and for the avoidance of doubt, I will say that my proposal is that there be a de facto zero level for certain categories of driver, namely newly qualified drivers and professional drivers. My proposal for all other categories of driver is to reduce the blood:alcohol limit to 50 ml, compared with the previous standard. In that regard, I will be consistent with what should happen in the Republic. I hope that, subject to Executive approval, consultation, the range of proposals that are forthcoming and the passage of any Bill through the Assembly, that new regime will be put in place during 2013.

The question that Mr Hamilton asks is important. We have had mutual recognition of disqualification on the island of Ireland since January 2010, further to European work and work between Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Given that we now have that and that there is now a new regime in the South whereby, depending on the level of alcohol that a person has in their blood, they may be subject to disqualification, people need to be aware that, in the event of a disqualification for more than six months, when they come North that disqualification will apply. They may have a clean licence in the North, but, if they do not have a

clean licence on the island, they will be subject to enforcement in respect of disqualification in the South. It is worthwhile to let that be more widely known. In my work over the next short period, I will make sure that it is widely known.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement and the fact that there are areas of co-operation on mutual recognition. Was there any discussion on incentivising novice drivers, or are there any examples that the Minister might bring up at the next meeting around working with the likes of insurance companies to incentivise novice drivers?

Mr Attwood: I think that the question strays beyond the content of the statement. I am not clear what the Member means by "incentivising novice drivers". There is an issue, and we acknowledge it. Even young councillors in west Belfast are having an adverse experience trying to get motor insurance, having bought their first car. The amounts are excessive. If that is what the Member means by "incentivising", it is an issue that we need to interrogate.

I established a road safety forum to put a spotlight on road safety issues in the Department. It includes representatives of all relevant stakeholders and other interests outside the Department. They meet me and my departmental officials in order to interrogate all issues of road safety, road management and motor insurance. There have been two meetings of that forum. It does not meet monthly; I believe that it should meet when necessary to progress the work that it has undertaken. The forum now has a member from the Republic of Ireland, who is involved to ensure best practice across the island. We will learn from them, and they from us: that is progress. Part of the work of that group has been to identify insurance as an issue. In that respect, I must work with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, because it is a matter that crosses departmental boundaries. It is on our radar, and we are looking at the issue. There is a disparity between what novice drivers must pay here compared with what they pay in Britain. It is a hard piece of work to progress, but it is on the radar to progress.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement and congratulate him on all the work he does to make driving on the roads much safer. On a different point, will the Minister give more detail on the heavy goods vehicle charging scheme and tell us whether extra costs will come through on the back of it that may affect the industry itself?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question and his kind comments. The question is opportune because this is a reserved matter for the London Government; it has not been devolved to the three regional Administrations. It is a reserved matter that the Department for Transport in London has flagged up its intent to pursue. Although it is still at a broad brushstroke level, the Department proposes that foreign heavy goods vehicle operators will have to pay a levy in Britain and Northern Ireland, just as operators from Northern Ireland, the Republic or Britain often have to pay tolls on European roads. That point of principle has been established, but the points of practice have yet to be determined. It appears that the Department, through a private organisation, intends to have a record of all vehicles that might enter the jurisdiction from overseas and impose on them, in a way to be determined, a levy.

We have a particular problem in that we do not have any toll roads, toll bridges or toll structures and would not be able to use the toll process to apply any future charge. We have the additional issue of vehicles using multiple points of entry to come from the South into the North. Consequently, managing a scheme, if there is to be one, would be much more difficult and complex in the Northern Ireland jurisdiction than it might be in Britain.

If a scheme is to be managed — I am not prejudging or, necessarily, signing up to that — it will probably be done through the DVA, using its normal enforcement processes of spot-checking vehicles on the road. That would be a way of monitoring and enforcing the new requirements. However, given that our circumstances differ from Britain's, that matter has yet to be determined. I flagged that up to Minister Varadkar. To be fair, he might not have been fully aware that this was coming down the road. However, if it does come down the road — to borrow a phrase — it is likely to be no earlier than 2014.

Mr Dallat: In discussing road safety, it is difficult not to think about the seven people who lost their life and the more than 30 who were injured on a motorway in England at the weekend. I am

sure that the sympathy of the House goes to them and their families.

The Minister is aware that human error is the main reason why people get killed and injured on the road. He will also be aware that, recently, there have been an alarming number of mechanical defects in heavy goods vehicles. What steps have been taken to ensure that good standards apply in the North and the South of our island?

Mr Attwood: I concur with the Member's opening remarks. Statistics prove that the three main causes of serious injury and fatalities on the roads are speeding, drink-driving and the failure to wear seat belts. The Road Safety Authority in the South and my Department in the North have tried to liaise closely to ensure mutual modelling around those issues in an effort to mitigate the risk of fatalities and injury that they cause.

The Member is right to point out the wider issue of heavy goods vehicles and road safety. We have to be up front about that. Particularly when vehicles move from the North to the South or from the North to Britain, there are issues about the standards in place for good maintenance and repair.

12.30 pm

A lot of our drivers and operators get caught when they move across to Scotland, because particular attention is paid there to road freight that comes from this jurisdiction. That is why I am in conversation with road freight operators. They are very anxious to ensure that there is better discipline and higher standards of road maintenance, that any operator who is on the wrong side of the law is better managed and monitored and that requirements are better enforced. That is the purpose of the road freight forum.

Given the movement of vehicles across the island, North and South, the aims of the forum are to encourage drivers and operators to drive more safely and to bring about better standards of maintenance and repair than has been the case heretofore. It is still early days for the forum and, to some degree, it is still finding its feet. However, road freight operators think that it is a very useful intervention, which I inherited from the previous Minister. In the fullness of time, I trust that we will see it deliver better standards and maintenance on a North/South basis and that the Government will take that forward where appropriate.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his statement. There is considerable concern in the community about the influence of drugs on driving. Will you tell us whether that issue was discussed at the Council meeting and what progress, if any, has been made on it in either jurisdiction? Do you plan an all-island approach to drug-driving, similar to the welcome approach to drink-driving?

Mr Attwood: That issue is very much on the radar not just at a ministerial level but at a road safety level generally. It did not, however, come up at the meeting. At the meeting, we interrogated the matters that I referred to in the statement, namely the new levy for road freight operators and the proposals for mutual recognition on a North/South basis.

The Member is right to flag up the issue. Work is ongoing to deliver more rigorous enforcement when it comes to road traffic offences, especially on the drink-driving side. For example, we are trying to identify much more sensitive equipment to test people at the side of the road in order to pick up alcohol in their blood. You are quite right: the effect of drugs on road safety is beginning to be fully explored only now. We are looking at how such offences are monitored, enforced and prosecuted, in the event that there is reason for concern.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. I think that Members across the Chamber would welcome the move to lower blood:alcohol levels. The Minister highlighted the processes that he has to go through before he can achieve that result. Will he give some indication of the timescale in which he believes that it could be achieved and given legislative effect?

Mr Attwood: I welcome the Member's comments. I anticipate that there will be support for what I propose. Some Members may think that what I am proposing does not go far enough. My inclination is to differentiate between professional and novice drivers and other categories of drivers. However, I have heard the argument that there should be de facto zero tolerance across the range of drivers. That is not my inclination at the moment. However, the direction of travel may suggest that that is where we go.

As the Member knows, I flagged up publicly and at Committee the fact that that is my inclination in respect of blood:alcohol levels and other matters. A paper is now being prepared that will be forwarded to the Executive in the very near future. They will need to sign off on the intention of the legislation, which will then be consulted on before going back to the Executive for final approval. The legislation will then go through its various stages in the House.

As I indicated in my opening statement, with a fair wind and other things being equal, we may be in a position to have the new regime in place by early 2013. In advance of that, certain matters can be dealt with by secondary legislation or administrative means to create new discipline in driving and new opportunities for good driving. That is why, in the near future, I will bring forward proposals that do not require primary legislation to modify further what newly qualified drivers are able to do. That will include motorway speed limits.

That is why Mr Dallat's comments are timely. I have certainly indicated — as has Mr Kennedy, I believe — that I am not minded to introduce any increase of the speed limit on motorways to 80 mph. Evidence suggests that an increase of the speed limit to between 70 mph and 80 mph has a significant disproportionate impact on road safety, collisions, deaths and injuries. However, I am still minded, in the fullness of time, to bring forward proposals whereby novice and newly qualified drivers would be allowed to drive on motorways at higher speeds in order to drive in real-time, real-life conditions and not to be stuck in the slow lane with heavy good vehicles coming down on top of them at much higher speeds.

Lord Morrow: On behalf of my party, I agree with and share Mr Dallat's comments that conveyed his thoughts and well wishes to the families of those who were affected by the dreadful traffic accident in England. I have no doubt that all our thoughts go out to those families today.

My question is not dissimilar to that which Mr Weir asked. In his statement, the Minister said that he hopes to introduce legislation that might permit experienced drivers to drink and drive but inhibit inexperienced drivers from doing so. I ask him sincerely whether he believes that that could cause considerable confusion. Is it possible for a zero tolerance level of drink-driving to be enforced?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his comments. There could be confusion. However, I believe that people can overcome it. As of Monday 31 October 2011, the bank holiday at the end of last month, the new regime became live in the Republic of Ireland. The Irish Government believe that different messages can be managed in such a way that they will get through to people eventually. That is what I anticipate will happen here. It will get through to professional drivers and novice drivers that they must comply with a zero tolerance regime. I will come back to that in a second.

Best science suggests that the level of a zero reading of alcohol in a person's blood cannot, realistically, be introduced or enforced. That is because people could be on medicine legitimately. Consequently, depending on the mixture of medicine that is taken, there could be a trace of alcohol in their blood. Therefore, best science suggests a de facto zero level of 20 ml. That legislates for background levels. It also means that anything more than that suggests that someone has taken alcohol.

As I have seen on the Floor of the House, in debates on various stages of various Bills, including licensing legislation last year, there may be a view, which may prevail here, that going further than what I am suggesting in differentiating the two categories of novice and professional drivers from other categories is the right way to go. I understand that argument. However, I am not minded to go in that direction. A proportionate response at this stage is to reduce the current higher level to around half for most categories of drivers and to zero for those categories that might carry most risk. Some 20% of novice drivers have an accident within two years of qualification. They are the people who are most likely to take alcohol, not have their seat belts on or drive at excess speed, all of which contributes to fatalities and injuries. In my view, that is a proportionate response, given that we want to enable people to socialise, have a drink, drive safely and to appreciate the different character that we have in the North of Ireland, given our rural communities, and all the rest of it. In my judgement, at the moment, that is a balanced approach, and we will see in the fullness of time whether the Assembly concurs.

Mr Beggs: In his statement, the Minister indicated that there are joint intelligence-led target operations in the border areas focusing on vehicle standards, licensing and drivers'

hours. He referred to the new legislation that was approved by the Assembly to give our statutory agencies increased powers to deal with illegal operators. Can the Minister advise us whether his opposite number in the Republic of Ireland will be updating their legislation so that they will be able to more easily address rogue operators, improve the standards of vehicles that may be coming into Northern Ireland and allow the agencies to address them?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for that question. If you step back for a moment, you will see that the two areas in which, arguably, the most progress is being made in respect of North/South co-operation and implementation have been the environmental and transport sectors. They actually set a template in many instances for how we can move things forward. I welcome the question, because it suggests that whatever the politics may have been around all that stuff previously, there is now an appreciation that, given that we are an island economy, given that we are a small part of the world and given the movements on a cross-border basis, the more we have common approaches and the best standards across the range of public policy on the island, the better we are going to be for it.

In the economic circumstances that we face, I strongly urge the Assembly, the Executive and the parties to have a gear change in respect of all that in order to save money, better spend money and better protect the welfare of people on the island, including on that particular matter. The entire direction of travel around the freight forum, the mutual recognition of penalty points and driver disqualifications, and the other work of the transport sector is to have greater consistency of practice. I will raise that matter with Minister Varadkar. It was not touched on in a dedicated way during the meeting, but, as we move forward, especially given the changes that there have been in road freight, the greater movement on a North/South basis and the issues around the standard of some of our road freight vehicles, it is a matter that he, I and any future Ministers need to address.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he advise us, in regard to the mutual recognition of penalty points, whether there are any statistics or information available to the respective Departments — or, indeed, the respective Departments of Justice — as to how many people have evaded losing their licence or heavier fines as a consequence of the lack of mutual recognition of penalty points?

Mr Attwood: I have not got the answer to that. I will ask my officials and Dublin to confirm the answer, but I think that it would be a guessing game. It was the case that officials in my Department believed that we could not even advance the issue of mutual recognition of penalty points. It was only when I came into office and asked officials to check out the legal situation that it was confirmed that, even in the absence of the other devolved Administrations and London taking the matter forward, we had the authority to take it forward on an inter-jurisdictional basis with Dublin. Up until then, the matter was not even on the radar. Now not only is it on the radar but dedicated work has been done to ensure that, over the next two years, we will have mutual recognition of speeding, drink-driving and seatbelt and mobile phone offences.

12.45 pm

I do not know the answer to the Member's question about how many people might have got through the system as a consequence of the failure to mutually recognise penalty points. Whatever the number of people or the size of the gap in the system, the purpose of the exercise is to ensure that the gap be closed.

Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): To abuse a child who is vulnerable through disability is, if it is possible, even more pernicious, as the victim's ability to have that abuse exposed is compromised further. I can think of no more heinous a crime than to abuse a child. For that abuse to be perpetrated by the very people who have been entrusted with the care of that child makes it all the more despicable.

That painful fact should not distract us from the reality that many good people have worked for many years doing the very best that they can to provide care and support for children and vulnerable adults in the most difficult and trying of circumstances. We must not let the despicable actions of a few slur the dedicated service of the many. I bring three things to the Assembly today: an acknowledgement of a very serious situation from the past; an assurance that nothing has been or will be hidden about what has happened; and an assurance of much-improved systems to protect children and vulnerable adults and to minimise the risk in the present day.

I want to set in context complaints about historical abuse from patients at Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital in the 1980s and early 1990s. At the outset, I want to make clear that my Department and its agencies have obligations not only to those who have made complaints but to those who have been accused. Those duties restrict the level of detail that can be released at this time and until all the relevant investigations have been completed. However, I felt it important that I make a statement now and set out the way in which I believe that the Assembly can have the fullest possible assurance that the right steps are being taken.

We will do three things: ensure proper investigation of all allegations of criminal activity and complaints of historical abuse to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are protected from potential abusers; provide support services to patients who may have suffered physically or emotionally from any form of abuse; and ensure that present-day practice conforms to best practice in service management to secure the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

All the relevant statutory agencies have to work within the principles of evidence-based process, but it is often difficult to obtain full and appropriate evidence. Where evidence is absent, incomplete or inconclusive, the right thing to do is to take whatever action is needed to protect the vulnerable, without infringing the rights of anyone who has been accused but is innocent unless proven guilty.

The complaints deal with several kinds of abuse. Some of the complaints raised issues about distress-caused harsh treatment, including physical restraint. What was considered appropriate at that time may not now be accepted, although there are circumstances in which physical restraint is still a necessary part of a humane and patient-centred regime. We will seek to help and to support those who suffered distress through harsh treatment. It is also critical that the appropriate procedures were followed when dealing with complaints, illegality or criminal behaviour. I believe that that has been the case, and where any doubts about that have come to our attention, the Department and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) have acted to remove the doubt; for example, by providing additional information to the PSNI. Of particular concern are the complaints of physical, emotional or sexual abuse that may have been perpetrated by members of staff on patients. That is my main focus today.

I also need to say that there is an ongoing police investigation into a number of cases that have come to light through the work done on historical abuse complaints. We will have proper and effective evidence-based processes to ensure the rights of victims and justice for all. It is important that the ongoing investigation is not compromised. Therefore, I may be unable to answer some of the questions that Members wish to raise.

The review of case files from Lissue Hospital, which date back two to three decades, and the conclusions of Mr Stinson's review confirm that the care of children in that period did not provide full and appropriate protection from harm. The review indicates that the regime was harsh and that a small number of staff may have committed acts of abuse. Unfortunately, Lissue is not alone. We know from survivors of childhood abuse and from other historical inquiries that it was a problem in a range of institutions.

Abuse is carried out in secret. It survives and thrives in secret. In many cases, it does not come to light until the person who was abused breaks their silence. We know how hard it is for survivors to disclose their ordeals. Many remain silent for ever, but many tell their story, often later in life. Indeed, one of the most heartbreaking aspects of the accounts of childhood abuse from people well into adulthood or even old age is that, as children, either they tried to tell someone and were not listened to or they kept silent because they felt that they would not be believed. It is positive that people who tell their stories today have the opportunity to do so and be listened to.

Without diminishing in any way the genuine wrongs faced by the victims of the abuse, the report indicates that it seems clear that there was not a systemic pattern of physical or sexual abuse in the hospitals. The report indicates that abuse may have been carried out by a small number of staff. Although we cannot rule out collusion among those individuals, I reaffirm that it was not abuse on an extensive scale and is not in the same league as previous reported cases. However, no scale of abuse against children is acceptable. It was wrong that it happened, and it should never have been allowed to happen. I am glad to say that procedures, checks and balances are now much more thorough in keeping the risk of abuse by staff to a minimum.

Each case of abuse that we hear provokes horror, shock and shame as we learn more about the terrible treatment that children have suffered and the burden that they have carried, often alone, for many years. I assure the Assembly that this issue has never stopped being the focus of attention in my Department, the health and social care system and the PSNI.

The process of acknowledging and addressing historical abuse is at varying stages across the world. Our neighbours in the Republic are further down that road, and we know what a long and difficult journey it has been for all involved. I am determined that, in my Department, it is clear that such behaviour was and remains unacceptable and that all historical abuse complaints will be dealt with seriously. I want to know what happened. I will demand answers about who was involved so that we can ensure that that type of behaviour is identified quickly and addressed urgently. That is why I congratulate the First Minister, Peter Robinson, and the deputy First Minister on their courageous steps to establish an independent historical abuse inquiry in Northern Ireland, and I offer my total support to them. The scope of the inquiry makes it clear that institutions such as Lissue and Forster Green are, unequivocally, within its remit. My Department will co-operate fully with the inquiry team. All information gathered or recorded by the Health and Social Care Board, the trusts or my Department on the historical abuse of individuals and in institutions will be shared.

I am also committed to working closely with my Executive colleagues to ensure that supports are in place for those who suffered as a result of childhood abuse and who may now come forward to engage with the historical abuse inquiry. There never has been, nor will there ever be, any form of cover-up in the Department or the health and social care service. However, some individuals who may have been involved in abuse will have tried to cover their tracks.

The review of practices at Lissue and Forster Green was set up to shine a light on where there may have been abuse or poor standards of care. The PSNI was involved in the process from the beginning, and all specific allegations contained in the Stinson report have been shared fully with the PSNI. Those in the health and social care sector work in close partnership with colleagues in the PSNI, and together they will seek to secure the evidence that will ensure that the perpetrators of crimes against children are held to account.

I now turn to the various reports in relation to Lissue and Forster Green and to some of the detail of the review and its findings. It is only fair to acknowledge that those working in child protection at departmental, board and trust levels, and in the PSNI and other agencies, identified the need for such a review and began the process that brings us here today.

At the time that the issue of Lissue came to attention, work was already under way to assess the possible scale of abuse in mental health and learning disability hospitals. In 2005-06, there was an investigation in Muckamore Abbey Hospital after a former patient made complaints about sexual abuse in the 1960s. Members will recall that that review was made public in February 2007. At that time, the then Minister, Paul Goggins, said:

"There should not be any confidence issues surrounding Muckamore because the protocols have been reviewed and they are fit for purpose."

He also said that the PSNI was investigating a number of cases. That review addressed mainly the sexual abuse of patients by other patients at Muckamore. However, the process of investigation also sought to establish whether there was evidence of the physical or sexual abuse of patients by staff. Following completion of the PSNI investigations, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) confirmed publicly in April 2011 that the investigations at Muckamore did not lead to any criminal prosecutions.

As well as following up thoroughly the complaints and evidence of abuse at Muckamore, the Department initiated a file review of a sample of patient records in each mental health and learning disability hospital, with the objective of establishing whether there was cause for concern about past practice at other institutions. That was called a retrospective sampling.

The Department also asked the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to provide evidence on the quality and standard of care in the present day. Those processes were initiated in 2006 following discussion with the PSNI, which has been fully involved in all the key processes and which has consistently affirmed the need to investigate historical evidence of criminal activity. The PSNI has also always been careful to remind all the health and social care bodies that they have a statutory responsibility to report evidence of possible criminal activity. That has been the clearly understood basis of the health and social care system's work on the issue.

While the retrospective sampling review was going on, in February 2008, a former patient of Lissue Hospital made a number of complaints to staff of the Belfast Trust about abuse of young people in Lissue, including herself, some 25 years previously. A joint interview by the PSNI and social services was carried out in March 2008, and the patient named several members of staff, some of whom were alleged to have been involved in abuse. On 2 May 2008, the Belfast Trust reported that information as a serious adverse incident simultaneously to the Department, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board (EHSSB) and the PSNI.

On receipt of the information, departmental officials assessed it and were able to relate it to two previous complaints from former patients at Lissue, dating back to the early 1990s. Those had been referred to the police and were investigated jointly with social services at the time. At that time, they had appeared to be isolated incidents, but in 1997, the Department wrote to the RUC to draw attention to the possibility of a link between them. In 2008, the Department shared the information relating to those cases with the Belfast Trust and the board, and the then Minister was advised of the matter.

Given the potential links between the new complaints and the older cases, it was judged by the EHSSB that a wider review was needed in addition to the investigation of the specific complaints made by the former patient. The EHSSB commissioned Bob Stinson, an independent consultant, to undertake a retrospective sampling of case files, which included files of children whose names had been mentioned by the former patient and a sample of other files. In total, 34 files were reviewed, covering the period from 1975 to 1995, of children who had been patients in Lissue and/or Forster Green Hospitals. The PSNI was kept informed of that work.

On receipt of the Stinson report in January 2009, EHSSB commissioned a review of the case sample and a commentary on nursing practice. That was carried out by Maura Devlin, the director of nursing and midwifery education from the Beeches Management Centre. Her report was completed in May 2009. The new regional HSCB inherited that work, and it subsequently commissioned a commentary on the quality of child psychiatric services available in the two hospitals at the time and a quality assurance report on the Stinson report.

That was compiled by Dr B W Jacobs of the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust in February 2010. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) was updated by the Belfast Trust and the HSCB throughout that process and received several updates and reports between January 2009 and March 2011.

1.00 pm

The findings of the Stinson report were shared with the PSNI at a strategy meeting in February 2009. The PSNI believed that certain issues warranted further investigation and undertook to provide a written conclusion on whether there

was anything of a criminal nature that needed further investigation. One file was submitted to the PPS, but it directed no prosecution. The PSNI noted that an earlier allegation had resulted in the then RUC submitting a file to the then Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), but he directed no prosecution. The PSNI completed its specific investigations into Lissue by May 2009 and confirmed to the HSCB that it was not proceeding with any recommendations to the PPS unless further evidence came to light.

However, my officials remained concerned about the total picture that had emerged from the retrospective sampling exercise and about the fact that all the work that had been done, including the Stinson report on Lissue and Forster Green, did not provide sufficient assurance. As I said at the beginning of my statement, the Department needed to be sure that all reasonable steps were being taken to ensure the prevention of abuse, and central to that task was the identification of potential abusers from past evidence. It was also vital that the PSNI was informed of all relevant potential evidence so that any criminal activity could be addressed.

Hence, in July 2011, following correspondence and discussion at the highest level, my officials handed over to the PSNI the reports from the reviews of all the mental health and learning disability hospitals, including Lissue and Forster Green, so that the police could consider the way forward. That process is incomplete. I understand that officials envisage reporting to me when firmer conclusions are reached, possibly within the next few weeks, but I was extremely annoyed that I was not given an interim briefing before the story broke last month.

Throughout this process, all specific allegations against named staff were investigated by the trust and the PSNI. One staff member was provisionally placed on the list barring them from working with children, pending an investigation by the trust, and was subsequently removed from that list. The trusts were also asked to review their practice in relation to any named staff who remain in employment and to report any significant concerns to the HSCB.

In addition to the ongoing police investigation, DHSSPS and the health and social care service are still following through on the retrospective sampling exercise. We need to ensure the systematic and consistent follow-up of all possible evidence of abuse, even of issues that are not relevant to potential criminal investigation. As before, the PSNI will be kept fully in the picture, and if initial samples of files show anything of significance, the circle of review will be extended. That work will continue until we can be satisfied that we have eliminated any material risk that a perpetrator of abuse is still in the system and that further investigation would be unlikely to uncover any new material evidence of abuse.

The original complaint that triggered the independent review was investigated fully, and a file was forwarded to the Public Prosecution Service. The Assembly will understand that I cannot give any further details of an ongoing investigative process, but I will seek to ensure that no stone is left unturned in the quest for justice.

With total respect for all the victims, we need, with full sensitivity, to respect and protect the rights and dignity of individuals with mental illness or learning disability who may not be able to provide evidence in court. It would, therefore, be wrong to draw a complacent conclusion from a small number of possible prosecutions. Even when evidence is limited, we need to act in a way that places the safety and dignity of children and vulnerable adults first. At the same time, it is important to deal fairly and transparently with staff. We must recognise the patient and faithful care provided by so many dedicated individuals in what have been Cinderella services for far too long.

In the past 20 years, we have come a long way in making services for children more caring, safer and more child-centred. Today, all health and social care services for children and vulnerable adults are regulated. Today, our doctors, nurses and social workers are all trained in child protection, no matter where they work. Today, services are delivered to clear standards. Most importantly, today, we recognise the importance of listening to children and vulnerable adults and of taking seriously what they tell us. That fundamental right for children and vulnerable adults to be heard is the cornerstone of making services as safe as possible.

It is important that we understand and learn from the past and that we acknowledge that there is pain and suffering. It is important that those who inflicted abuse are identified and held to account, and it is also important that we

all work together to ensure that the safeguards to protect children and vulnerable adults today are the best that we can make them.

Mr Wells: I welcome the Minister's statement. He said that he knew nothing about this particular issue until it was revealed in a newspaper. What steps has he taken to establish why he was not told about it, given the seriousness of the allegations made?

Mr Poots: My permanent secretary has advised me that he was waiting for a planned meeting with the PSNI on 14 November 2011 to take place so that he could provide greater clarity as to how the investigation would move forward. It is unfortunate that the story came to the media in advance of that. However, I believe that I should have known about this at an early point. It is a matter of public concern, and it was always going to be a matter of public concern once the issues came to light. I understand that the previous Minister was made aware of it in 2008, and it was somewhat unfortunate that I was not made aware of it. It is a crucially important issue. The abuse of children cannot be ignored. It is absolutely right that we get on top of these issues as quickly as possible in order to ensure that we respond properly and consistently to the issues at hand and that we can deal as effectively as possible with cases that might arise in the future while seeking to eliminate the possibility of their arising.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome the Minister's statement this morning, but a very worrying development has come out of all this. The Minister stated that a member of staff was provisionally included on the barring list to prevent that person from working with children or vulnerable adults pending investigation by the trust but was subsequently removed from it. To my mind, that means that that person is now free to work with children and vulnerable adults either in the public sector or the voluntary sector. That is not good enough, Minister.

Only one person was put on the list temporarily but at least six nurses have been linked to the allegations of sexual abuse. Are those people still able to work with children or vulnerable adults? The Minister said that he wants to ensure that this does not happen in the future and that it is historic, but it is still very real. It is real and present to those who suffered at the hands of those people, some of whom were psychopathic — I accept that that refers to some of them, not all of them. Many people are working to protect children and young people, but the people who were involved in this have escaped prosecution and disciplinary action and could still work with children and young people in any capacity. Is that good enough, Minister?

Mr Poots: First, the initial report that was sent to Minister McGimpsey made an allegation relating to six persons. Those allegations have been investigated, and it does not appear to be clear that there is any evidence against a number of them; in fact, where we have evidence, it relates to two members of staff.

The Member asks whether it is good enough that a person was put on a list and then taken off it. I do not think it is good enough. I do not think that it would be good enough if there were any potential for either of the two individuals — neither of whom are working anywhere with children at this moment in time — to ever work with children again. I make that very clear.

Whilst it may be difficult to prove some things in court given the nature of the young people involved, the capacity issues and all of that, we must always err on the side of caution in these instances to ensure that children are properly and adequately protected. We have a duty of care to children now and in the future to ensure that that is the case. The two individuals involved should never have the opportunity to work with children again. I reassure the House that they are not working anywhere in the system as things stand.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement on this disturbing and worrying matter. The original report, which was hidden, made recommendations that the board and trust should have robust systems for dealing with and managing complaints from children in mental health facilities. Can the Minister give a rock-solid commitment that those robust systems are now in place?

Mr Poots: I am not sure about the original report being hidden. A series of reports have been done and made available to me and, indeed, the PSNI. The purpose of that is to seek to ensure that justice is done. It is more important to pass reports to the PSNI than to newspapers. Newspapers cannot actually bring anyone to book. It is for the authorities — the

PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service — to ensure that true justice is done.

The systems are in place. I am involved in it now, because I am very well aware of the situations that have arisen. I will ensure that the system is robust. As I indicated, where possible, we will make every effort and leave no stone unturned to ensure that we follow the quest for justice.

It is incredibly difficult to bring prosecutions in instances that involve people who have learning disability issues and where there are no medical records to verify that any wrongdoing actually happened. Nonetheless, we must pursue these cases and the individuals involved as far as possible to ensure that justice is carried out and to send a very clear message that abuse of this kind is unacceptable. It is unacceptable in 2011, and it was unacceptable in 2001, 1991 and every year before that. Abuse is wrong, and we need to challenge it wherever it happens.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: There may be some problems with the microphones, so I ask Members to speak up.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phriomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. What guarantees, if any, can be given that there will be no repeat of this kind of incident? To follow Mr McCallister's question: we do not want a repeat of this horrific litany of abuse. However, we also do not want a repeat of the shabby handling of the investigation and the media mismanagement.

Mr Poots: You can never guarantee that something like this can never happen again. The nature of life is that there are evil, wicked people out there who want to prey on vulnerable individuals. They are clever people, and they have plenty of craft and guile in what they do. There are vulnerable people out there who perpetrators will go after. It is our task to ensure that, as far as possible, we separate those evil, wicked and vile people from the vulnerable people.

Considerable steps have been taken to ensure that these things do not happen, but I cannot give a cast-iron guarantee that they will never happen. The systems and safeguards in place in both the health and social care and voluntary sectors today are much more robust than those that were in place in the 1980s and 1990s. Staff vetting, the introduction of best-practice guidance and regular inspections by the RQIA are all in place to provide the level of safeguards necessary to protect vulnerable adults and children.

We should never be complacent, and we should continually be alert to the possibility of abuse, wherever it might arise and whoever may be the cause. We have a wholly different system and wholly different practices in place today, compared with what might have been acceptable in the 1980s.

1.15 pm

Ms Lewis: I thank the Minister for his statement on this very serious and distressing issue. Can he confirm how many other staff were involved in the abuse and where they are now?

Mr Poots: The number of staff whose names cropped up in the report extended to 19. However, the report covered a range of areas, including mental, physical and sexual abuse. The physical abuse very often involved restraint mechanisms that were acceptable then but that we do not deem acceptable now. A large proportion fell into that category of abuse. I should also say that there was patient-to-patient abuse, and there is an issue about how staff managed that. There was also mental abuse. One of the reports that I read referred to a child who was made to stand against a wall for an hour and a half, because, after soiling the bed three times, the child refused to wear incontinence pads. That is one of the types of abuse that was looked at.

Sexual abuse appears to be associated with two individuals, and that is the issue that causes most concern. The system that was acceptable in the 1980s is not acceptable now. Practices that were acceptable then are not acceptable now. Those practices apply to a wider number of staff, but, when we drill down, acts of gross indecency are linked to two members of staff, as far as we are aware at the moment. We could always hear more reports, and, as the issue is discussed more publicly, more information may come forward, so we cannot exclude the possibility of further cases. As a result of the investigations that have been carried out to date, we are aware of two members of staff who engaged in that type of activity.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. From the publicity over the past week or so, it appears that not all the children involved had learning disabilities. It seems that

some with eating disorders, and so on, may have been affected.

I want to ask the Minister about something that appears slightly contradictory. His published statement reads:

> *"the report indicates that it does seem clear that there was not a systemic pattern of either physical or sexual abuse in these hospitals. The report indicates abuse may have been carried out by a small number of staff."*

Surely even a small number of people can create a systemic pattern of abuse. The statement continues:

> *"I want to reaffirm that this was not abuse on an extensive scale and is not in the same league as previous cases reported."*

I was not aware that there was necessarily a league table of abuse. Abuse is abuse. Surely it can be systemic by a small or large number of individuals.

Mr Poots: I made it very clear in my statement that no scale of abuse is acceptable. If you are going to quote, it would be useful if you quoted the entire context. This is not comparable to Kincora, to the Magdalene laundries or to much of what we heard went on in the Republic of Ireland. Nonetheless, it is wrong, insidious and something that we want to put our foot on. We do not want this country besmirched by that type of activity.

I will do nothing whatsoever to cover up that type of activity. I will seek to ensure, at all times, that we make clear to the public, as we are able to do so, what has been going on and what actions we will take to ensure that it does not happen in future. However, this is not the type of activity that took place in other institutions, where children were repeatedly beaten for no apparent reason, where children were regularly sexually abused by a wide range of people and where those people, when they were discovered, were moved on to other places where they could abuse more children. That is not the context that we are looking at today; it is wholly different. Nonetheless, it is wrong, and I will not stand over the activities of individuals who have been entrusted with the care of vulnerable children, whether those children have learning disabilities or mental health issues, if they did not provide the appropriate care for them.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement, especially given the sensitivities surrounding these findings. Have the Department or the trusts found evidence of abuse in any other mental health or learning disability facility?

Mr Poots: As a result of the initial report that came from the patient from Muckamore Abbey Hospital, there was a 100% file review of Muckamore. As I explained, that went to the Public Prosecution Service but was not pursued. Most of the cases there involved patient-to-patient abuse. We then did a file check on all the other facilities across Northern Ireland. That went after 10% of the files where cases were deemed to be most vulnerable.

I am reporting today what I am aware of and have knowledge of. I believe that, as we move to the historical enquires arena, more cases will emerge and more people will come forward. They will want to set the story straight, give information and, hopefully, achieve some form of justice. I will not be surprised if there are other cases, but we have sought to be up front and identify the potential for cases, as opposed to covering it up. That is the clear and fundamental difference between this situation and what maybe happened in other institutions where abusers were moved from one place to another. We have actually set out to identify whether and where abuse has taken place and to follow it up. That is a wholly different scenario.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his statement, although it is disappointing and, I am sure, very upsetting and annoying for him and his predecessor. My understanding is that neither the previous nor the present Health Ministers were informed about these processes until about 10 days ago. Will the Minister tell us whether that was due to a breakdown in communication in his Department, or is there any evidence of a deliberate attempt to keep this matter from the Minister and his predecessor?

Mr Poots: I know that my predecessor received a report on 15 May about allegations in Lissue Hospital. It indicated that there were a number of issues of concern. It indicated that someone, who had been a child 25 years previously, had reported incidents that had taken place and named six members of staff. That kicked off a number of investigations by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board.

Nonetheless, it is important that, at a public level, the Minister responsible for a Department is kept informed of such circumstances. It is certainly something that I will ensure happens over the next number of months and for as long as I am in office to ensure that we know as much about these issues as possible. I assure you that reading the Stinson report and others was not something that I enjoyed doing. However, it was absolutely necessary to do that to identify what is going on. I have said it before and will say it again: if we are to make mistakes, I want those mistakes to be on the side of caution so that children and vulnerable adults are given the maximum available protection.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement.

As a result of this abuse coming to light, organisations such as the Nexus Institute have been inundated, to the point that they have not been able to cope with demand. What type of immediate help will the Minister give to those organisations?

Mr Poots: We greatly appreciate the work of the Nexus Institute, and we will work closely with it to ensure that it is capable of dealing with requests. We are constantly under financial pressure, but we also constantly have to identify where the greatest needs lie. If the Nexus Institute finds, under its existing resource, that it is not capable of dealing with the number of complaints, we need to talk about that to ensure that people are dealt with and counselled properly and that nothing is done that might hinder them coming forward with evidence that may lead to the prosecution of individuals who deserve to be prosecuted.

Mr McDevitt: The Minister has been rightly remorseful this afternoon. In late October, he gave an interview to the BBC in which he suggested that some of the people who had been abused at Lissue House might have forgotten about it, and, therefore, his Department might not need to provide them with support. Will the Minister apologise for that remark and clarify exactly his Department's best practice in that regard?

Mr Poots: Mr Deputy Speaker, I apologise if I take a little longer than usual to answer this question.

The Member may or may not be aware, but I have a brother who was in Muckamore Abbey Hospital. This issue has caused me great vexation, because we have our own concerns about what went on in that facility. I am sure that I have visited that facility over 1,000 times in my lifetime, and I know many of the young people who were there, and I know about their mental capacity issues. Given those mental capacity issues, many of them would not be capable of remembering what went on. That was the context of my response to the BBC. It makes me very certain and clear about my attitude on the issue, which is that we must ensure maximum protection for the children and the vulnerable adults who are in our care. Those people deserve that, and, as a society, it is the least that we can do. I want to ensure that that is the case.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive and genuine statement. Will he advise when the Department became aware of the problems at Lissue House?

Mr Poots: A range of issues regarding Lissue House came to the attention of the Department. It would probably be useful if I gave a chronology of events.

In the early 1990s, a number of reports were passed on to the RUC. Allegations were made in 1990, 1993 and 1994. Investigations were carried out according to the protocols between the police and social services. I understand that the allegations could not be further investigated because the young people involved refused to be interviewed by the police. The matter continued to be pursued by social services. In 1996, the South and East Belfast Trust tried to ascertain information on a recurrent allegation by a young person, but she again refused to be interviewed by the police. In 2005, there was a complaint from a former patient in Muckamore Abbey, alleging sexual abuse from some 30 years earlier.

In May 2006, a senior management group (SMG), chaired by Paula Kilbane, was established to co-ordinate DHSSPS/PSNI action, and 296 case files were reviewed. In September 2006, the permanent secretary wrote to trust chief executives about the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in learning disability hospitals and mental health hospitals to seek assurance that procedures and processes are in place and to outline the need for a retrospective sample, given the time period involved. RQIA was also asked to provide

independent assurance on those matters and to complete work by May 2007.

1.30 pm

In May 2007, the deputy secretary wrote to trust chief executives reiterating the need for retrospective sampling and to call a meeting with trusts on 20 June 2007. In June 2008, the RQIA review was completed. In October 2008, the permanent secretary wrote to trust chief executives conveying recommendations arising from work of the SMG and requesting the production of trust action plans in response to the RQIA report. In January 2009, the permanent secretary wrote to RQIA seeking assurance that the trust action plans were appropriate, and RQIA wrote to the permanent secretary in November 2009 confirming that the trust action plans were appropriate. On 18 March 2010, the director of HSCB submitted Lissue Hospital and Forster Green Hospital reports to the Department.

In May 2010, the departmental professional advisers considered retrospective sampling reports from the trusts and provided options on the way forward. In March 2011, the permanent secretary wrote to RQIA requesting a follow-up review of each trust's safeguarding arrangements within the next 12 months. Again in March, the permanent secretary wrote to the HSCB seeking formal assurance that all action in trusts' retrospective sampling exercises is complete and that any allegations of abuse have been appropriately investigated, as well as the details of any further action required. Also in March, the permanent secretary wrote to the trust chief executives seeking formal assurance that current practice on risk management is being adhered to, that all investigations of abuse comply with best practice and that any future allegations of abuse will be promptly managed and referred to the PSNI for investigation.

In March 2011, the permanent secretary wrote to Assistant Chief Constable Will Kerr seeking a meeting to discuss the findings of the retrospective sampling exercise. That meeting took place in May 2011. In June 2011, at a meeting of the retrospective steering group, it was agreed to pass retrospective sample papers to the PSNI, and in August 2011, the departmental medical adviser and policy members met the PSNI to have the views of the retrospective sampling exercise made known. That is the chronology of events, and I trust that it is helpful for Members to realise the scale of the work that has been going on.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. It is a very sensitive issue, and people need to be sensitive about it.

We need to assess the level of abuse and to ensure that the victims or survivors of that abuse get the help that they need. Could the Minister detail what type of outreach work his Department is doing with families? I am sure that there are families out there who have had relatives in those institutions and who are worried about who to turn to. Is any outreach available for all the people who went through those institutions around that time?

Mr Poots: It is important that people feel that there is somewhere to turn to at these times. For those who feel suicidal, we have Lifeline, which provides terrific support for such people, and Nexus also provides an invaluable service to us. I was asked earlier about the financing, and so forth, of that service. It is providing an invaluable service. We need to encourage people to use its services, and if those need to be enhanced, we will have to look at that. However, if people and families require support, we need to encourage them to use that service as far as possible.

My colleagues in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) are developing support for the historical abuse inquiry, and I will work with them on that to ensure that people receive the appropriate counselling and support at this difficult time.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement on this very sensitive issue. In July 2011, it appears that officials handed over to the PSNI only reports of the reviews of mental health, and Lissue and Forster Green were included in those reports. Why does the Minister think that the PSNI was involved only at that late stage and not kept in the loop continually?

Mr Poots: The PSNI has been involved, and the RUC was involved in 1990 when the first cases were identified. In 2006, a meeting took place between the strategic management group, involving the PSNI and health and social services, and it was established at that point. The then head of the Civil Service, Nigel Hamilton — now Sir Nigel Hamilton — and the DHSSPS permanent secretary met the

PSNI in 2006 to discuss the allegations and investigations. That was in addition to the investigations undertaken by the police at the earlier point.

When it became clear from initial findings of the sampling exercise that those could, potentially, result in criminal proceedings, it was necessary to find out from the police what further investigations might be required. The PSNI was also consulted by my Department on receipt of HSCB's final report and action plans arising out of the Lissue and Forster Green reports. With regard to speculation that may have arisen in some newspapers over the past few weeks that there had not been co-operation with the PSNI, I think that the PSNI has made it clear that that is not the case and that it has been receiving the full co-operation of the Department. I trust that the response at this time, showing the level of work that has been going on with the PSNI, indicates that that is the case.

Mr Dallat: I, too, share the same sense of personal hurt as the Minister, as I, too, had a brother in Muckamore Abbey Hospital for five years when, we believe, he received the best care and attention. However, these reports are very disturbing.

Does the Minister agree that without good quality professional journalism, many of those scandals would never have been exposed? Does he accept and recognise that the journalists who put the story into the public domain have done society a great service?

Mr Poots: This matter would have come to my attention, and I would have brought it to the House. That is the appropriate mechanism for doing things. Having been elected by the public to the Assembly, my first call of duty as a Minister is to report to the Assembly. It should be done in a structured and honest way, and it should be non-sensationalist. This is not about selling newspapers and, for me, it is not about votes. For me, it is about doing what is right and ensuring that the children and vulnerable adults who have been entrusted to others for their care actually receive that care and are not abused. We all have a duty to ensure that. If anybody is aware of anything that has been reported to them, they should ensure that it is followed up. Since coming into office, I have had allegations made to me about issues, and I have put those allegations into the hands of others to investigate. That is the mechanism for doing those things and for seeking to get to the truth. The truth is what is important here.

Mr Easton: Has RQIA been involved the investigation? Any type of sexual abuse is totally unacceptable, and that evil act has to be rooted out of our society.

Mr Poots: At the Department's request, RQIA conducted a review of trust procedures to prevent the abuse of children and vulnerable adults in mental health and learning disability hospitals. The report was completed in 2008. Although the review identified a number of examples of good practice, there were concerns about the work that remained outstanding, especially in relation to staff training and the number of children and young people being treated in adult wards. In October 2008, the permanent secretary wrote to trust chief executives requesting the production of trust action plans in response to that RQIA review. In January 2009, the permanent secretary wrote to RQIA seeking an assurance that the trust's action plans were appropriate. That assurance was received from RQIA. In March 2011, RQIA was asked to conduct a follow-up review of each trust's safeguarding arrangements. That has been scheduled into its plans.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to be brief. I commend the Minister for his resolute defence of children and his personal categorical assurance that he will leave no stone unturned. I acknowledge the Minister's difficult position in that, in a sense, he had to acknowledge his personal family experience. It was very unfortunate that that was dragged out of the Minister here this morning. It should not have had to have happened, but I commend the Minister for his ability to deal with it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maskey: We do not need the catcalling.

Mr McDevitt: That is out of order.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maskey: I am trying to deal with a serious matter. To be heckled by someone who is looking for a cheap headline — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor to ask a question. The

Member is asking a question. Other comments can be taken up.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. People are making personal statements here today. I have a sister with Down's syndrome. She has been in institutional care for 30 years. I understand the Minister's position, but it does not take away from his personal duty.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have made a mistake. I have been told that I should not have taken a point of order during questions to the Minister's statement.

Mr A Maskey: It sounds as if it was not a point of order anyway.

Acknowledging what I have just said, and without rehearsing that, my reading of the situation is that, first of all, it is absolutely incomprehensible and unacceptable that the Minister had to find out in a newspaper article about an issue of this magnitude and one that was going on over a number of recent years. I know that the Minister has acknowledged that. That he found out in such a manner is absolutely disgraceful and unacceptable. It leaves a huge question mark over the people who were involved in the issue. The bottom line is, and I would like the Minister to respond to this — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will be heard.

Mr A Maskey: This morning, we heard from the Minister. Certainly, we know that the abuse has been established and, unfortunately, proven, but the bottom line is that we are also being told that not one person has been held to account for the abuse. We have heard that members of staff have been identified.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We need a question.

Mr A Maskey: Why, at this time, has not one person been held to account for the abuse, which has been established and which was going on recently and over a number of years?

Mr Poots: All the evidence that we have gathered to this point has been passed to the PSNI, and some of it went to the Public Prosecution Service. They have decisions to make on their ability to make things stand up in court and to ensure that there is a successful trial. As things come out in the open, I hope that more information will come forward that will assist the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service to a point at which they can make prosecutions. If there are things that we believe have happened, but, at this point, cannot substantiate as proven beyond all reasonable doubt, it would be unfortunate if, as a result of the failings of others, individuals got away and were not prosecuted.

I hope that more information will come forward, even as a result of what we are doing today and the historical inquiries that are taking place. I hope that we will get to the point at which prosecutions take place. Obviously, I am not responsible for prosecutions; that is the responsibility of the PSNI in conjunction with the PPS. I am responsible for ensuring that they get all the information that is available. All that I can say to the House today is that I will ensure that all the information that may lead to a prosecution will be passed to the relevant authorities.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his statement. In his statement, the Minister said that he was "extremely annoyed" that he had not been given an interim briefing prior to the breaking of the story last week. I was very disappointed to hear the Minister, in a response to a Member's question, say that it was unfortunate that the story broke. I pay tribute to the journalist Seanin Graham and to 'The Irish News' for bringing the story to the public of Northern Ireland. Had it been brought to us five or 10 years ago, a lot of people probably would not have suffered the abuse.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question?

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister assure the Assembly that all those who suffered or witnessed abuse in any of the institutions are offered every assistance with their well-being? Will he also assure us that it will be easy for abused young people to come forward to receive any assistance that his Department can give?

1.45 pm

Mr Poots: It is hugely unfortunate that some Members think that it is better for information to be leaked to the media and to encourage that practice than for Ministers to bring such information to the House to explain things in this forum. I see that some Members are shaking their heads and obviously think that

leaking information is a much better way forward than a Minister informing the House that they have been elected to.

Leaks diminish the role of the Assembly and government. It is incumbent on government to be honest with the people. This is the forum where that should happen, and newspapers should then report on that. Leaks to the media, and so forth, do not achieve anything. Such leaked information can, very often, cause considerable damage in the way that it is handled. It can be used to besmirch individuals undeserving of criticism, and it can stir things up and cause tensions for the victims. The House and the Committee are the mechanisms through which such information should be handled, and I am disgusted that some Members believe that handling it in some other way is better.

I stated that we are working with Nexus and that we are working with junior Ministers Anderson and Bell to devise a scheme through which victims of historical abuse can come forward to receive support. The Executive have made a commitment to doing that. Indeed, before any newspaper or publication had broken anything, the Executive had identified that, if abuse took place in facilities across the country, there needed to be a mechanism for those people to come forward to make their voices heard. That mechanism does not need to be something that is taken over by solicitors, but it does need to be something through which people can get the message out, have their voices heard and see justice done.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the fact that the Minister and his party welcome inquiries into past wrongdoings. Will the Minister tell us whether he has had, or intends to have, discussions with OFMDFM on whether any inquiry into what happened at Lissue Hospital and Forster Green Hospital will be included in the OFMDFM investigation into child abuse cases?

Mr Poots: I have made that clear during a number of interviews and in my statement today, but I will reiterate it for the benefit of the Member. That will form part of the historical inquiry established by OFMDFM. We will submit all the information that we have to assist OFMDFM in identifying the issues, and we will fully co-operate with that Department on the issue.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement to the House, which was very difficult for him to make from a personal point of view. It was unfortunate that some sought to make political capital out of the statement; indeed, that was reprehensible.

In the Minister's response to Mr Spratt, he talked about the investigation conducted by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the PSNI. Why has the investigation in the Department dragged on for so long?

Mr Poots: Clearly, a number of issues surround this. Given the vulnerability of the individuals involved, presenting them to a court of law to be cross-examined in the normal way would make it very difficult ever to achieve successful prosecutions. That causes considerable difficulties, and that is why we, as a Department, undertook a file search to identify any corroborating evidence and sought to make things more robust. All those things have taken a painstakingly long time. Going through files to identify where things have happened that maybe should not have happened is almost reading between the lines, as opposed to reading what is in front of you. It is very difficult work and all of it has taken a considerably long time. I do not defend that, but that is the nature of it.

I remind Members that, in all this, we take people, who look after vulnerable children, away from social services to investigate the past. There always has to be some degree of balance between investigating the past and dealing with the present. As we move into historical inquiries, I am concerned that we do not take our eyes off the ball to ensure that, in 20 years' time, people will not ask: what went on in 2011 and how did we get it so wrong then? We need to ensure that we have adequate numbers of staff available to stamp out abuse insofar as that is possible. Unfortunately, the highest levels of abuse take place in homes, not institutions.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister on the statement.

Private Members' Business

Pat Finucane Case

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

A valid petition of concern was presented today on the motion and the amendment. Under Standing Order 28, the votes cannot be taken until at least one day after the petition has been presented. The votes will, therefore, be taken as the first item of business tomorrow morning, Tuesday 8 November. The motion and the amendment can, however, be debated today. I remind Members that another effect of the petition is that the votes on the motion and the amendment will be taken on a cross-community basis.

Mr A Maginness: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the British Government's acceptance that there was collusion by the army, the RUC and the Security Service in the murder of Pat Finucane; recognises that accepting collusion is not sufficient in itself and that the public now need to know the extent and nature of that collusion; and calls on the British Government to honour the binding commitment, made by the then British and Irish Governments in the Weston Park agreement, by establishing a judicial inquiry, as recommended by Judge Cory in 2004, with the power to compel witnesses to give evidence under oath.*

I will start by saying that the book 'Lost Lives' concludes that 3,720 people were killed during the course of the Troubles. Pat Finucane was murdered on 12 February 1989, and some ask, and rightly ask, why his murder should be seen as any different to the murders of the other 3,719 people.

The egregious nature of Pat Finucane's murder is not because of the wanton cruelty of shooting dead a young man in front of his three children and his wife on a quiet Sunday afternoon. Outrageous though that atrocity was, it does not make his murder significantly different to that of others. What makes his murder exceptional is that it highlights the extent to which the UDA were encouraged, assisted and directed by elements within the army, the RUC and the security services. What his murder highlights is the verifiable fact that collusion with the UDA, a loyalist paramilitary organisation, was part and parcel of British Government security policy in Northern Ireland.

In the House of Commons on Wednesday 12 October, the Secretary of State, on behalf of the British Government, stated:

> *"The Government accept the clear conclusions of Lord Stevens and Judge Cory that there was collusion"*

in Pat Finucane's murder. He reiterated the Prime Minister's apology to Mrs Finucane and her family on behalf of the British Government. The official apology is to be acknowledged and welcomed, but more needs to be done in exploring and determining the extent and nature of that collusion between the British state and loyalist paramilitaries. Was it purely tactical and, therefore, limited, or was it embedded? Was it strategic? Was it part and parcel of the military security complex, and was it policy? If so, was there political approval and political direction behind such a policy?

In his overview report in 2003, Lord Stevens concluded that there was collusion and, furthermore, that the murder "could have been prevented". The report states that the original investigation of the murder:

> *"should have resulted in the early arrest and detection of his killers."*

In 2004, Judge Cory, a distinguished Canadian jurist, found that there was:

> *"strong evidence that collusive acts were committed by the Army, the RUC, and the Security Service."*

Despite those authoritative conclusions and the long but effective campaigning of the Finucane family and, indeed, by my party and others, nationally and internationally, the current British Government have rejected a public inquiry. They have opted for an independent review to be conducted by the no doubt distinguished lawyer Sir Desmond de Silva QC to produce a full public account of any state involvement in the murder.

I am sure that Sir Desmond is an honourable man and an independent-minded jurist. However, his review will simply be Cory 2. It is no

substitute for a full, independent judicial inquiry into this notorious murder. As Mark Durkan MP said, it is a "twilight-zone review" that will be unable to compel witnesses. To me, the decision by the Prime Minister to order a review is a serious betrayal of trust with the Finucane family, particularly his widow, Geraldine. It was exceptionally cynical and cruel to invite the family over only to offer them this review. They were angry, and I share that anger.

I am perplexed by the Government's actions, as they had engaged in detailed negotiations for at least a year over a form of inquiry similar to that carried out into the death of the Iraqi Baha Mousa. Indeed, it was the British Government who suggested that that form of inquiry might have been acceptable to the Finucane family. The fact is that the British Government reneged on an informal commitment to an inquiry. One must ask: why did they do so at the last minute? Was it, perhaps, because sinister forces that had previously permitted collusion within the security services coerced the Government at the last minute into rejecting or reneging on a full public inquiry? That question remains to be answered, and I think that the Secretary of State was, rightly, embarrassed.

Leaving aside the legitimate concerns of the Finucane family, the British Government's decision is also a breach of Weston Park, where they entered into an international agreement to deal with this issue. The methodology that was established was that a judge, such as Judge Cory, would look into these matters and if there were sufficient evidence to suggest collusion, there would be a public inquiry.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No, I will not; I have an awful lot to get through.

Thus, arising from that we have the Breen and Buchanan inquiry, and we also had the Hamill, the Wright and the Nelson inquiries.

2.00 pm

Despite the delays, the stated position of the previous Government was that there should be a Finucane inquiry. There was a dispute with the family over the Inquiries Act 2005; nonetheless, the British Government's position was that there should be a public inquiry. The Cameron decision, however, represented the rejection of such an inquiry and a breach of the Weston Park agreement and the agreement with the Irish Government. The Irish Government have quite rightly criticised the British Government's unilateral decision. What we say to the Assembly is this: it is not the external facts that we need to know, because we already know them. We have the Stevens report, although it has not been published. What we need to discover and judge is the extent of invisible political and security force involvement. Vital to this is the extent of the political involvement of Whitehall and the Ministry of Defence, in particular.

It is interesting to note that, in an article entitled 'Pat Finucane probe could expose more than gunmen' in the 'Belfast Telegraph' in January, the distinguished security journalist Barney Rowan wrote:

> *"This is a killing that many believe takes you into that place known as the 'dirty war', a story that is not just about the UDA, but that has other hidden hands. It is not just about who shot Pat Finucane, but why we was shot, and who wanted him dead … What if Owen Paterson decided there shouldn't be an inquiry — how could that be explained? For many that type of decision would simply confirm a cover-up — of a truth too ugly to be told."*

We suspect that the British Government have opted for a cover-up, not truth, and we do not believe that the Assembly should collude in that cover-up. Let the Assembly demand that the Weston Park agreement, the commitment to a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane, be fully implemented. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr G Kelly: I beg to move the following amendment: At end insert

> *"; and further calls on the British Government to establish this judicial inquiry within the next three months."*

I welcome the motion. Our amendment adds rather than takes away from it. At the outset, let me say that I am very disappointed that unionists from across the Chamber have decided to put in a petition of concern. I heard reports that, when Belfast City Council was passing a motion in support of an inquiry, unionists, even though they disagreed with the motion, agreed that collusion had taken place. So I hope that there is no disagreement on that point.

Last Thursday night, I was at a conference in west Belfast at which Geraldine Finucane, Pat Finucane's wife, spoke. Anyone who has

watched her on television or listened to her will know that she is very eloquent and has always been very dignified in her grief and throughout the campaign. I pay tribute to the whole family's courage and determination to move the issue forward.

Let us remember that the inquiries were agreed to 10 years ago — quite a substantial period — in Weston Park. There were six separate cases, five of which have been completed or are ongoing, including the deaths of two police officers and the killing of Billy Wright. Like Alban Maginness, I find it hard at this stage to work out how, after 10 years and over a year of negotiations, a family could be lured — that is the only word that describes what happened — over to Downing Street with great expectations and then given the message that the British Prime Minister gave them. They had agreed to a Baha Mousa-type inquiry to deal with the case. I know that their first objection was the Inquiries Act 2005, which, of course, was brought in after there was agreement to hold an inquiry. However, the Baha Mousa inquiry showed them that an inquiry can be held without the interference of government. Why would the Finucane family be brought over to London for David Cameron and the Government to then very publicly renege on an agreement that both the British Government and the Irish Government had given? Why would the family be insulted so publicly and led up the garden path on all this? It cannot be because of money; they were only after having the Baha Mousa inquiry and, of course, the other inquiries that had taken place.

At the meeting the other night, which was very well attended, I was struck by the number of other grieving families of victims who got up, praised the Finucane family and said that the case is symbolic. Of course, people ask why there should be an inquiry into the Finucane case and not other cases and so on. The Finucane case is, probably, more symbolic because the point had been reached where there was agreement that an inquiry should be held. Yet, here we have a reversal of that decision. At that time, other families said that they felt that the case represented them; in other words, a lot of hope was placed in the case, and, if it could bring out the truth, there was hope that there would be truth for others, especially in collusion cases.

The point that I am making and the reason why I mentioned the other cases is that people, particularly unionists, seem to talk about collusion as though it happened only in republican cases. Of course, it did not. When collusion was used by the British Government and the state forces, it was used across the board. Therefore, I argue they should not be afraid of the truth coming out. In fact, I must say that my party, Sinn Féin, is being approached by people on the unionist side because unionism will not take up their cases of collusion. Frankly, unionists should be ashamed of that. Members on the opposite Benches may laugh. We have been approached about cases on the unionist side because they were rejected by Members on that side of the Chamber.

The Finucane case is a festering sore for the British Government, the Assembly and all victims of collusion, of whom there are, unfortunately, very many. It needs to be lanced. We need to establish the truth and to establish how high up the chain that collusion went, not just to bring relief to the Finucane family and many other families out there who are looking for the truth and closure but, perhaps most importantly, to send a message that it should not happen again. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Mr Givan: I made comments about the killing in the Matters of the Day debate on this issue. Those comments are on record, so Members can refer to them.

Pat Finucane was killed in 1989. He, along with more than 3,000 other people, suffered as a consequence of the terrorist campaign that took place during that terrible 30-year period. Members on this side of the House find it difficult to understand why Pat Finucane should be elevated above all other victims of the Troubles. What is so special about Pat Finucane that he and that family need to have that public inquiry? The Finucane family has already had the Stevens inquiry in 2003. That cost £9 million; it took 9,256 witness statements; its archive has over one million papers; and it seized 16,194 exhibits. It was one of the largest police investigations that has taken place in UK history. Then we had Judge Cory's report in 2004. What is it about Pat Finucane that merits a public inquiry, when countless other victims have not had what the Finucane family had from the Prime Minister?

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: No. If I have time later, I will give way.

They got what other victims' families have not had — an apology directly from the British Prime Minister. There has been no apology to the hundreds and hundreds of other victims. Mr Kelly said that the family were lured to Downing Street. I find it quite ironic to hear that term from Mr Kelly. There are hundreds of other families who wish that they had got to Downing Street and got an apology from the British Prime Minister. Now we have this review by Sir Desmond de Silva, which will have access to all the other files and papers that were created by the Stevens inquiry. He will also be able to invite submissions from others, if he wishes to do so. The investigation into the death of Pat Finucane has got well above and beyond what many other families have had. The Members opposite need to reflect on that.

We have the true agenda coming out from the proposer of the motion and from the amendment. It is all about collusion, what went on in the past and trying to rewrite that history. In his initial comments, Mr Maginness said that it was part and parcel of what went on with the police and the UDA, which I think was the paramilitary that he was referring to. He later said that we needed to make an assessment and judgement, but he did not say that in his initial comments, when he said that it was part and parcel. Really, this is about republicans, in particular, trying to rewrite that history.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: No, I will not. He did not give me that courtesy.

That is what all of this is about — trying to rewrite history. Mr Kelly may want to have the truth especially in "collusion cases" and to say that there were many victims of collusion, but there were hundreds of victims created by the IRA. Those victims will never know the truth, because some people cannot even face up to the reality that they were in the IRA. They will never get the truth. The Members opposite can somehow lecture piously about how this particular case requires a public inquiry and the truth to be heard. The public will know what is really at stake in all of this: it is the rewriting of history.

Let us put on the record our thanks to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, particularly to special branch, for the tremendous work that it did in saving hundreds, if not thousands, of lives throughout the conflict. Members opposite will not like that, because, ultimately, the RUC drove them to the negotiating table and defeated the IRA. They do not like the fact that they were defeated then, and we are not allowing them to defeat the history of what the RUC achieved during that period. We will not support the motion or the amendment.

Mr B McCrea: I agree with Mr Givan. We will not support the amendment or the motion. I am disappointed that the motion has been tabled. Yesterday, I listened intently to the speech of the new leader of the SDLP. Much of what he said was to be welcomed, particularly what he said about a different way of working with people from a unionist background. I am interested in exploring that. I cannot, therefore, understand why it serves us here to table a motion that is divisive. The point is that, if we are going to deal with the past on an individual basis, we are going to have to deal with all of the past.

2.15 pm

I asked for permission to bring the 'Lost Lives' book here. I opened it at random, just to prepare for my speech. I will read some things out. I will not detain you too long, but I want to make the point that there are many victims. I look at random, and I see an entry for David William Bingham:

> *"His body was found at Institution Place off Divis Street after he had been shot in the head three times by the IRA."*

He was on his way to a hospital appointment. Just a few days later, Mr William Staunton, a magistrate:

> *"died in hospital 15 weeks after he was shot by the IRA as he dropped two daughters and their friends off to school on the Falls Road."*

One of his daughters was still in the car. I will move randomly through the book. Richard Latimer from Fermanagh:

> *"was shot by an IRA gunman in his hardware store in Main Street, Newtownbutler, early on a Saturday afternoon. His 11-year-old son and several customers witnessed the killing."*

I could go on, but almost every page in that book describes a personal tragedy.

Mr I McCrea: No doubt, as the Member goes through the book, he will see many names from my constituency. He and my colleague referred to the fact that, if we go down the route of an inquiry, all that we do is leave the people

who are also victims in this case without one. I presume that he will agree that, as he has already said, we need the truth to be told for everybody. We need to ensure that every victim of terrorist crime is given that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr B McCrea: That is indeed the point that I was making. When you go through the individual cases, you cannot but be heartbroken. I wonder how we will deal with the issue of the past.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: If you are quick.

Mrs D Kelly: I will be very quick. Will the Member acknowledge that the gift of finding out the truth about the past and of giving each of the victims' families a say in how we deal with the past lies with the DUP and Sinn Féin? The Victims' Commission produced a report in June 2010 and presented it to those parties, but they have done nothing with it since.

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

Mr B McCrea: I will not take any further interventions, because I am running out of time. I will say to the deputy leader of the SDLP that I am really interested in seeing what proposals her party comes forward with on how we deal with those issues. I find it somewhat difficult to hear Sinn Féin Members talking about the matter in the way in which they do, as if one side was whiter than white and the other was blacker than black. I am incredulous, and, to be honest, I feel that it is distasteful. I do not mind if people come forward and say that they have a particular issue, but we must be honest.

I want to tell the Members who tabled the motion why I reject it and the amendment. The truth is that we already know the truth. Mrs Kelly was a member of the Policing Board, so she knows that Stevens 1, Stevens 2 and Stevens 3 have already looked into the matter in some depth. Mr Givan mentioned that there were 9,256 witness statements, one million pages of evidence and 16,194 exhibits and that it was one of the largest police investigations in UK history. The proposer of the motion, Mr Maginness, also said that the person who has been asked to look into the matter is a distinguished QC with the United Nations and a man of absolute integrity. His purpose, as stated by the Prime Minister, is to bring out the truth. That is the commitment that was given.

Many people have said to me that, in the past, we took too long to reach conclusions. It does not do any of us any good to spend a lot of money to discover what we already know. What is important is that the information comes out. However, this piecemeal attitude to trying to rewrite the past looks as if it is an orchestrated campaign, and, because of that, it will be rejected. Collectively, we must find a way of dealing with the past. If you are going to do it for one person, you should do it for every single person whose name appears in 'Lost Lives'.

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

Mr B McCrea: This is no way to do it. The motion and the amendment are unhelpful, and we will reject them both.

Mr Ford: It is clear that there are many significant and great concerns about what appears to be a partial interest in a small number of victims of the Troubles, yet that, it seems to me, is not what the motion is about. It highlights, on the basis of what was agreed at Weston Park by the two Governments, the particular concerns of the Finucane family. The House must recognise the concerns expressed by that family in the light of promises made, while recognising the points that have already been made by Mr Givan and Mr McCrea and will, doubtless, be made by others on that side of the House as we look at the needs of all victims and this society as a whole.

As Alban Maginness highlighted, the genesis of this issue is the Weston Park agreement of August 2001, paragraph 18 of which states:

> *"Both Governments will therefore appoint a judge of international standing from outside both jurisdictions to undertake a thorough investigation of allegations of collusion in the cases, of the murders of Chief Superintendent Harry Breen and Superintendent Bob Buchanan, Pat Finucane, Lord Justice and Lady Gibson, Robert Hamill, Rosemary Nelson and Billy Wright."*

Paragraph 19 states:

> *"If the appointed judge considers that in any case this has not provided a sufficient basis on which to establish the facts, he or she can report to this effect with recommendations as to what further action should be taken. In the event that a Public*

Inquiry is recommended in any case, the relevant Government will implement that recommendation."

I have considerable sympathy with what has just been said by Basil McCrea about the elevation of a small number of families over others. However, that does not alter the fact that a promise was made by two Governments at Weston Park. If Governments have any credibility, they keep the promises that they make.

Mr A Maginness: Further to the Member's point about Weston Park, the fact that there is a commitment to the Finucane inquiry does not exclude some other mechanism of looking at the thousands of other people who died during the Troubles. It is not mutually exclusive.

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

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for that point, which is what I was getting to. Of the six cases highlighted, it is my understanding that the Gibson family did not want a full judicial inquiry. It seems that their names were selected by the two Governments in some sort of sectarian balancing exercise, which only increases my cynicism of the way in which Tony Blair behaved on occasions such as that. However, that does not alter the fact that a promise was made to the Finucane family. That is fundamentally why they have every right to feel that they were treated shabbily by the current Government.

We need to recognise the needs of all victims. We need to ensure that we have a comprehensive way of dealing with the past. We managed to address that in the Assembly only a couple of weeks ago. As the two Governments made promises about this case and the others in what was described as a solemn international agreement, that can lead only to our supporting the motion. I am not sure entirely what is added to the motion by the amendment. Indeed, I did not actually hear Gerry Kelly make any real reference to the amendment in his speech; it seemed to be more about supporting the motion. It may be that a three-month timescale would be impractical in any circumstances.

It is certainly a significant regret that we are now faced with a petition of concern. Instead of having an all-embracing discussion about dealing with these difficult issues of the past and looking at the needs of victims from every section of this society, we are now down to a simple sectarian headcount, as if nothing matters but preserving the status quo on one side or attacking it on the other. That is not how I interpreted the motion that was proposed. Unfortunately, however, it is the reaction that we are left with because of the petition of concern. It has simply highlighted the divisions that exist in the Chamber and this society.

A couple of weeks ago, before the recess, the Assembly passed a motion from my colleagues that called on the Secretary of State to convene talks about how we could take a comprehensive look at the past in a coherent way that would recognise the fact that there are victims from every section of society and the need to deal with that adequately and in a proper way to ensure that we can build and move forward together. Naomi Long has recently followed that up with the Secretary of State. Unfortunately, it appears that the Secretary of State, despite a unanimous wish from the Assembly, is not, at this stage, willing to carry forward that process. It is a matter in which the Government have responsibilities, the same as it is a matter in which OFMDFM has responsibilities and this Assembly, as a whole, has responsibilities.

We cannot deal with everything that happened in the past with a few selective inquiries, with the work that is being done by the Historical Enquiries Team, given its limitations, with the work that is being done by the Police Ombudsman and with the legacy inquests in a small number of cases. That becomes a partial process, and that will always be a divisive process. We need to ensure that we find some way of joining up the issues of seeking rational discussions in private meetings so that we can give some leadership from this Chamber to people in this society and not perpetuate divisions. On the basis that the motion refers to the needs of one family, I support it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time is due to commence at 2.30 pm, I suggest that Members take their ease for a few minutes. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Edwin Poots.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 9 and 12 have been withdrawn and will require written answers.

National Park

1. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions have taken place with the farming community about the establishment of a national park, and what are that community's main concerns.
(AQO 661/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank Mr McElduff for that question. I make it clear again that I am a very firm believer in national parks for the North of Ireland. We are the only part of these islands that does not have any national parks. A model of a national park dedicated to the particular needs of the North of Ireland — not the model in the South or in Britain — is a good way forward for the better environmental management of any area so designated, which creates jobs and protects all interests.

I know that there are concerns. Even at the party conference at the weekend, farmers in the SDLP were raising — *[Interruption]*. I will come back to that in a second. *[Laughter.]*

The farmers raised issues with me about national park designation and the impact on the farming community. So, my strategy going forward is to lead that debate and to look forward to legislation and the designation of national parks. Also, I will try to create a maximum level of agreement to mitigate some of the fears that are about and to build the argument and support base wherever we have one or more national parks in the North.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Chomhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra.

I thank the Minister for his answer. Does his Department have any indication of the running costs associated with the management of a national park? I think that you spoke about a particular model for the North. However, I believe that a comparative size of national park in England costs something like £3 million to £4 million to manage annually.

Mr Attwood: Some scoping out has been done on costs but that is still a bit premature. We do not have any national parks legislation in place or an implementation plan for how that would be put into effect or operate. Yes, there will be costs around national park designation because there would be a requirement for one, or more than one, national park management group to take forward the management of one, or more than one, national park in the North.

So, there will be costs, but look at the benefits. There would be better protection of the environment and natural heritage in any area so designated. At a time when people are faced with economic difficulties, a national park would create a model for positive economic growth in those areas in a way that would create jobs and protect local interests. In my view, it would even lead to farmers in a national park area having premium produce simply because it came from a national park. So, yes, there would be costs up-front in creating and managing one, or more than one, national park but there would be many other benefits for the environment, jobs, tourism, tourism spend and premium products coming out of that area. I believe very strongly that the balance sheets of national parks, if that is what this comes down to, are heavily loaded in favour of them.

Mr I McCrea: I hope, in the first instance, that the lights are not too bright for the Minister to see the brief that he has in front of him. Having said that, in respect of the establishment of a national park, will the Minister ensure that he will listen to the concerns of the people who do not agree with his position and ensure that their voices are heard?

Mr Attwood: I can confirm that I will listen but there are some things that I will not listen to. What I will not listen to is an argument put to me by people who are hostile to a national park in the Mournes and who said to me at a meeting 10 or 12 weeks ago that those who favoured a national park in the Mournes did not love the Mournes. That was the argument made by people who live in that area about others in the area who are in favour of a national park for the Mournes: those who farm there and are

devoted to and protective of the quality and character of the Mournes.

I will not tolerate anyone creating worse fears to derail what might otherwise be a good project. I made that clear to them at that time, and I make that clear now. We will work to mitigate fears and to reassure people if those fears are genuine, if they are not exploited for narrow advantage and if there are real concerns about the shape and impact of a national park in any part of the North. I have not predetermined where any national park may or may not be designated.

Conclusions can be drawn from the fact that a number of farmers from the Mournes who were opposed to a national park heretofore are now supportive of it because they have seen, through the Mourne Heritage Trust and other interventions over the past while, how better management of land, pathways and the protection of animals can protect their interests and the environment, and how that can build agreement around the national park proposal.

Mr McCallister: Does the Minister accept that it is absolutely vital to overcome the fears and concerns of the farming community who own much of the land that would be designated, and that engagement with the farming community —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr McCallister: — is most necessary? What engagement will the Minister have with local councils? I ask because most of them might be expected to have some role in management.

Mr Attwood: In the event that legislation is tabled and endorsed by the Executive, there will be extensive consultation in order to have a parallel path of implementation around the same time that that legislation is passed. I know that this is a highly charged matter, and that there is anxiety and concern in the areas that might benefit from designation, so appropriate and reasonable consultation will take place with all stakeholders, farmers, councils and others besides.

I want to make it clear that I understand the concerns of the farming community. People from north Antrim spoke to me over the weekend about how the management of the neighbourhood at certain times of the year and particularly at weekends, around Glenariff, for example, was very difficult because of the number of people and cars that were coming into the area. They told me about people who bring scissors with them when they go out walking so as to cut through fences to let their dogs get on to land. A consequence of that is that animals, particularly sheep, become scared. They also told me about people camping in the area who use fence posts for lighting bonfires.

I appreciate that the behaviour of the few in areas of natural beauty in the North has created a sense that to invite more people into those areas would be a threat rather than an opportunity. I understand that. We need to create arguments that reduce those concerns. I believe that it is an argument that we can win, and that the argument for national parks can prevail.

Septic Tanks

2. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration has been given to providing grants for the replacement of septic tanks. (AQO 662/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question. I confirm that there is no grant scheme in the Department for the replacement of septic tanks. I am not ruling it in or out, but a scheme to replace septic tanks in the North would require a capital budget of around £12 million. We have about 108,000 septic tanks, as well as at least 15,000 to 20,000 that are not yet registered. I am not closing the door on that opportunity, but that is the scale of the finance required were we to introduce a grant scheme.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that septic tank replacement would improve water quality and that the Minister has said that he is open to looking at it, will he work in partnership with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to introduce a septic tank replacement scheme?

Mr Attwood: As I said, I will look at the proposal. I will consider the proposal with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. However, we also need to recognise that there is very good compliance in the North of Ireland when it comes to septic tanks. The Republic of Ireland has a difficulty at the moment: due to the way in which septic tanks, soakaways and all the rest have been managed over a long period, the Republic is in danger of being on the wrong

side of the European authorities when it comes to infraction.

That is not the situation here. We have a programme of trying to identify where a septic tank is not in place. Given that we have 108,000 septic tanks that have been monitored and found to be in compliance, and given the existing architecture of the planning system and the operation of septic tanks, soakaways and other mechanisms that deal with waste, we actually have a good, healthy position. I have to say that, in the NIEA (Northern Ireland Environment Agency) and the Department, we have staff who are very judicious about how they manage breaches and non-compliance.

I will look at working with other Ministers. We can look at any intervention, especially in advance of a new water directive from Europe in 2016, which will build more rigorous standards into the quality of our water generally. However, I need to point out that only 10% of water course difficulties come from septic tanks. All the rest come from discharges from other sources.

Ms Lo: Last year, an NIEA study found compliance issues with 10% of septic tanks, which is about 12,000 tanks. Has the Department quantified the level of pollution? What is it doing about the problem?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. A snapshot study in one part of the North indicated that there were issues of non-compliance with up to 10% of septic tanks in that neighbourhood. I may well get a question in that regard shortly.

Where we identify compliance issues, the Department works very closely with the householder in an effort to rectify the problem. The proof of that is that only two cases have been brought to the point of prosecution and court penalty since the regime came into place nearly 40 years ago. You could argue that that is due to a lack of enforcement, but you could also argue — and I think that this is the right argument — that the Department's attitude to compliance issues is very generous and careful.

Indeed, the Department learnt a bit of a lesson from the Magherafelt pilot study that you referred to after some concerns were raised that it was coming down heavy in respect of compliance issues. I see my colleague nodding in agreement. The Department learnt from that experience and is now working very closely to ensure that we accommodate rather than enforce; that is the right approach going forward. Indeed, there are some cases in which the Department adopts a particularly sensitive and cautious approach when issues of compliance arise. For example, when there are difficult individual circumstances involving mortgage debt or elderly people.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Councillor Kate Lagan and I drew attention to those practices. They had been painted with a very broad brush, which was the totally wrong approach for NIEA to take on that occasion. However, lessons were learnt, and, hopefully, we have moved on from that situation.

Will the Minister give us an update on the wider issue of the provision of housing in the countryside, how Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 21 on development in the countryside appears to be working in practice, and when the review that has been initiated will take shape to deliver for our rural communities?

2.45 pm

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge what the Member said. Based on the Magherafelt experience, the Department has adopted a more proportionate, even delicate, response in managing this issue. I had, by now, intended to have outlined to the Committee and others the conclusions of the review of PPS 21. However, three Mondays ago, a meeting with Tom Elliott and colleagues of his from Fermanagh identified two or three further opportunities for consistency or some flexibility beyond what I had already identified in the review of PPS 21. I have papers on the review, and there may be some tweaking, given the very useful exchange that I had with Mr Elliott and his colleagues. Certainly, within a very short space of time — two or three weeks — I will be in a position to confirm how we are going to ensure consistency of interpretation of PPS 21. Good practice that is applied in some planning offices could be applied in others on issues such as access to properties, properties that cross laneways, properties that are close to farm buildings, and other related matters, in a way that realises the legitimate opportunities intended under PPS 21.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Planning Applications

4. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to suspend consideration of a planning application where the applicant is under investigation by the planning enforcement office. (AQO 664/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I have no plans to suspend consideration of a planning application in the circumstances stated in the question. However, I understand the sentiment behind the question because, within the Department, the application of good enforcement policy is lacking. That is my overall view. It is lacking for a number of reasons, sometimes related to staffing. The environmental crime unit (ECU) is 14 members of staff below complement. We are going to correct that by appointing 11 new staff in the near future.

There is a wider issue about applying the enforcement powers of the Department, be it on the environment side, the planning side, or through the ECU. That might be, to some degree, the sentiment behind the question, and I agree with that. That is why, within the Department, I have adopted a position when matters come to my attention where the Department has not, in my view, demonstrated a robust enough approach, be it on the planning side or the environment side, that that matter is turned around in such a way that I think you will see a wider lesson beginning to be learned around the North. Those who are in breach of planning or environmental requirements are going to be addressed more robustly in the period ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that there is some difficulty with the sound system. I am trying hard to understand what is happening. I ask Members to remain quiet when they are not called. I do not want to be able to listen to others' conversations that should not be listened to if they are picked up by the system.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that there seems to be a slightly bizarre set of circumstances in the Department in this regard? For example, if someone were being investigated for a drink-driving offence, they could not be considered for the job of a school bus driver. If someone were being investigated for some sort of sexual offence, they could not be considered for work with adults with learning disabilities or with children or young people. Therefore, to have —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member ask a question, please?

Mr D McIlveen: Thank you very much. I am just getting to the question, although I felt that context was important. In the context that I set out, is it fair that a resident who has been the victim of a planning application that has not been adhered to and is going through an enforcement process should then receive another proposed application from the same applicant while he or she is being investigated? That surely seems a very surreal —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has had sufficient time. I call the Minister.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. In essence, he is right. In my view, there are parts of the North where, and I say this very cautiously, individuals or developers have had the run of the planning system and the Environment Agency. They have been able to manage applications or licence issues in a way that enables them to skirt between continuing what they were doing and frustrating, slowing down or otherwise impeding what should be the right outcome, be it on the environmental or planning side.

If that is the sentiment that you are expressing, I agree with you. By putting more people into the environmental crime unit and instructing officials to be more robust on the environment and planning requirements for various developments, a lesson might be learned by those who manage the planning system to suit their own needs and to frustrate the wider intention of planning or environmental law. That will not happen as long as I am in this office.

I have sent out a particular instruction on what should happen when what is, essentially, a duplicate application is made after a decision to refuse an earlier one. The Department has the power to determine, very early in the planning process, that such applications are the same, similar or duplicate and are being used to enable business to continue without planning permission, even when a planning application has been refused.

I agree with the sentiment behind the question, but, ultimately, having a fixed rule of suspending a planning application while there is an enforcement issue —

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

Mr Attwood: — sounds healthy, but ends up being —

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

Mr D Bradley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire cén céatadán de na hiarratais atá i gceist agus cad iad na catagóirí ina bhfuil siad.

What percentage of applications falls into the enforcement category, and will the Minister give us more detail on them?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. We must have some sympathy with our planning staff. Across the divisional planning offices in the North, only 37 members of staff are responsible for planning enforcement. Of those, only 29 are full-time staff. Given that, in any year, up to 8,000 or 8,500 complaints are made about planning issues, the scale of complaints compared with the available resource is disproportionate and can lead to the frustrations that Mr McIlveen and others identified.

It is my understanding that, in the past two years, 741 enforcement notices have been served on those in breach of planning applications. I do not have the figure, but I have asked officials to provide information on the number of cases that have gone before the courts. As I indicated previously, however, as well as planning side enforcing regulations where there has been a breach, there is an obligation for the courts to enforce and to do so robustly. That is why, as I have said before, I welcome the work undertaken by the Lord Chief Justice with the Judicial Studies Board to fully and better train members of the judiciary in the North. The aim is to ensure that when breaches occur or no applications have been granted, the courts' enforcement regime, including penalties, is more consistent, robust and rigorous so that, ultimately, those in breach of the law will learn lessons.

Mr W Clarke: In light of the Minister's comments in the Chamber today, is he minded to carry out a review of planning enforcement? I do not want to prejudge tomorrow's debate.

Mr Attwood: I do not want to anticipate tomorrow's debate either, but thank you for the question. I suggest that, since I became Minister, that is precisely what I have been doing by acknowledging the good work of the environmental crime unit and insisting that its staff complement is upgraded. That is part of the review of the planning system to ensure more robust enforcement. A new human resources plan dealing with the deployment of planning staff across the divisions, including enforcement, will be published shortly. That is testament to my understanding that the planning system required a new human resource plan to ensure that staff were deployed in the right way to get the best outcomes. As Mr McGlone asked, I undertook a review of PPS 21 to ensure consistency and flexibility in local, rural applications, when that is justified. If there were an examination of the spread of my work in the Department and my review of the way in which it did its business in the past, be that on the environmental, taxi, planning or any other side, there is evidence that not only have issues been reviewed but interrogated to make it more fit for purpose.

Septic Tanks

5. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of the Environment how many septic tanks have a valid permit. (AQO 665/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Approximately — I use that word cautiously — 108,000 septic tanks serving single domestic dwellings in the North possess a Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 discharge consent.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his response. He will be aware that, before October 2001, there was an unknown quantity of unconsented septic tanks. I think that I heard him say that there were between 15,000 and 20,000, but I may have misheard that. If that is the case, will the Minister provide an update on his Department's efforts to identify and regularise all such tanks?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. Our cautious assessment of the number of domestic properties in Northern Ireland that do not have a discharge consent is that there are up to 20,000. As the Member indicated, ongoing work continues to identify all possible domestic properties at which there are discharges. In my previous answer, I indicated that when such discharges are identified, the Department works diligently and co-operatively with those who are in breach to regularise the situation. Damage to water quality in the North caused by septic tanks represents only 10% of the overall phosphorus and other nitrates that

could enter the water system to undermine the quality of our water.

Mrs D Kelly: What is the Minister's assessment of the scope for the greater use of technology to deal with foul waste in rural areas?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question. The replacement of a septic tank would cost £5,000, and the creation of an operational soakaway would cost approximately £2,000. I would like other models of discharging waste to be deployed. There are good examples, such as the use of reed beds and other effluent treatment mechanisms that are environmentally friendly, but the numbers and opportunities are marginal. If we are to continue to display the green and clean credentials of this part of the island of Ireland, another touchstone against which we could judge progress is for discharges to fulfil more rigorous environmental standards, including being green in nature.

3.00 pm

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that question 7 has been withdrawn and requires a written response.

Unemployment

1. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the continuing rise in unemployment figures. (AQO 676/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In common with many other advanced economies, unemployment in Northern Ireland continues to rise, with 60,900 persons now claiming unemployment benefits. Although that is clearly disappointing, recent increases have not been of the magnitude experienced at the height of the downturn, and the annual increase in Northern Ireland's claimant count — 5·2% — was the lowest increase among the UK regions. The UK increase was 8·8%. In addition, Northern Ireland's unemployment rate, which was 7·6% from June 2011 to August 2011, remains below the UK average of 8·1% and was also lower than the EU average of 9·5% and the Republic of Ireland rate of 14·5% for July 2011. Given the prevailing global economic uncertainty, economic conditions continue to be challenging.

Ms Ruane: Could the Minister let us know what concrete plans she has put in place to tackle the soaring numbers of unemployed young people here? Everywhere I go I hear family members talk about their young people who do not have jobs, and they ask what your Department is doing. There is mass emigration from this island. Could the Minister update me on her plans?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. Indeed, all regions of the UK have seen their youth unemployment rates rise during the recession, and research has shown that youth unemployment is, unfortunately, more sensitive to economic shocks than other types of unemployment. Statistics show that 8·5% of those aged under 25 in Northern Ireland are claiming unemployment benefits, and we have taken actions to try to help those young unemployed. We are also concerned about the long-term unemployed, because the evidence shows that the longer a person stays unemployed, the more difficult it becomes for that person to come back into the workforce.

The jobs fund, which is the short-term employment scheme that was launched some time ago, contains, I think, 40 projects that have the potential to create over 1,000 new jobs, many of which will benefit young people. The jobs fund announcements that have been made to date, including 336 jobs in Capita in north Belfast and jobs in AXA, 1 Stop Data, Fresh Food Kitchen and Creative Composites, will particularly benefit young people and graduates. I know that they are not interchangeable and that many young people do not have the skills that some of our other young people have. As I have often said to Invest Northern Ireland, although we must have more and better jobs for our graduates, it is very important to look at young people who do not have the skills available to them. We have been doing some work on that with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), and we will continue to work with DEL to try to deal with youth unemployment.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has outlined some of the progress that has been made in a relatively short period through the jobs fund. What prospect might there be for people on the north coast? At my invitation, she visited the

north coast some time ago. How will people in the Causeway Coast area be able to avail themselves of and benefit from the jobs fund?

Mrs Foster: As I say, a number of announcements have already been made through the jobs fund, although to hear some in the Assembly, you would think that that is not the case. The first big announcement was in north Belfast, where Capita will provide 336 jobs. There were three announcements in Londonderry: AXA with 13 jobs; 1 Stop Data with 24 jobs; and Fresh Food Kitchen with five jobs. The jobs fund is capable of going right down to the very smallest companies, and I have often said to Invest Northern Ireland that if we can create one or two jobs in a lot of small companies, that will have a huge proportional impact on those companies and on the local economy. More and more companies are coming forward to us to try to avail themselves of that.

We will go out with a focus on finance seminar very soon. We will go to, I think, six towns around Northern Ireland to try to encourage a lot of those smaller firms to come forward to tell us about their difficulties with finance. We are very aware that financial difficulties and access to finance remains a huge issue for a lot of those small firms. Unfortunately, having spoken to some of the banks recently, I think that the prospects for some of those smaller firms are not good because a lot of smaller companies and, indeed, medium-sized companies got involved in the property market at the height of the market and, as a result, a lot of them will face great difficulties over the next couple of years. It is something that we should be concerned about, and it is something that I am talking to officials about at present.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. Does she accept that the local enterprise companies provide a valuable service in promoting small and medium-sized enterprises and in creating employment? Does the Department have any plans to enhance the status and the abilities of the enterprise centres to tackle youth unemployment in particular? Furthermore, does the Minister recognise that, in the past, community employment was greatly catered for by Enterprise Ulster and that it provided a worthwhile jobs effort?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Enterprise Ulster provided a good service to the community, and, as the Member knows, Enterprise Northern Ireland has been working with Invest Northern Ireland for some time now. Unfortunately, under procurement rules, we have to go out from time to time to tender for the programmes that are delivered by the different agencies, and that happened recently. There is little that I can say, because, as the Member is aware, there is a legal challenge ongoing on those matters. However, Invest Northern Ireland has put in place appropriate arrangements to respond to any enquiries that come forward under the Go For It programme that would have gone through Enterprise Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the tender has been challenged and, therefore, we have to try to deal with those enquiries through another means. However, they will be dealt with through another means, because I recognise that we need to be there at this time to give advice and assistance to any small company that needs it, and we are providing that through Invest Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to try to be succinct with their questions so that more of them can be answered.

Tourism: Ulster Scots

2. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the tourism potential of the Ulster-Scots heritage. (AQO 677/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Ulster-Scots culture is part of the visitor experience in Northern Ireland and should be integrated into the development of Northern Ireland's broader tourism products, such as food, music and festivals, genealogy and literature. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is working with product providers in local councils to identify opportunities to develop specific Ulster-Scots visitor experiences. A study was funded with North Down and Ards borough councils that led to the development of a number of tourism products based on Ulster-Scots stories, including three driving trail maps. Tourism Ireland is targeting that segment with extensive marketing programmes as part of its ongoing marketing activity to promote Northern Ireland in North America.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answer. Last night's MTV European Music Awards (EMAs) were a success, and we had many American tourists here, many of whom were carrying the image of Andrew Jackson on the $20 bills

in their purses and wallets. However, it was disappointing that when they went to visit the Andrew Jackson ancestral home in Boneybefore outside Larne, it was closed. Arthur Cottage in Ballymena, the ancestral home of Chester Arthur, was burned down. I welcome what the Minister said about doing more with councils. However, can she give me information to ensure that we capture the potential that is there and not allow it to pass us by?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has asked his question. Thank you.

Mrs Foster: I do not think that any of the many visitors who came to Northern Ireland for the MTV awards were disappointed with their experience. Quite the contrary. Last night was a tremendous opportunity for Belfast and the whole of Northern Ireland to sell ourselves to the world, and we did it very well. I take this opportunity to thank everybody involved, including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Belfast City Council and, in particular, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which did a tremendous job to ensure the safety and security of all our visitors.

A number of councils are doing very good work with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. I have mentioned North Down Borough Council and Ards Borough Council, which have been developing trails in and around their areas so that when they come to visit, people can identify all the different areas where people can go, such as churches, graveyards, towns and villages, to look at their genealogy and to get the story behind their ancestry. I also want to mention a number of festivals that take place from the Ulster-Scots perspective throughout the year, such as the Broadisland Gathering in east Antrim and the Cairncastle festival. Those are annual events, and I understand that their organisers are working more proactively with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

If local councils, organisations, etc, have events, they need to make the Northern Ireland Tourist Board aware of them so that they can be marketed in the package. If there are problems with various places not being open at appropriate times, let us hear about them and let us try to address those issues, because 2012 is our year of opportunity. We must take advantage of it.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council. Does the Minister agree that, over the years, Northern Ireland has had a problem with its reputation and perception internationally? I pay tribute to Gerry Copeland and his team in Belfast City Council for securing the MTV EMAs. What benefit will the weekend's events have for Northern Ireland, particularly Belfast, in the months and years to come?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. It is forecast that hosting the EMAs over the weekend and the events throughout last week will generate around £10 million to the local economy immediately. I would not be surprised if that figure were higher. It is estimated that worldwide media coverage of the EMAs will generate around £10 million worth of PR. However, it goes far beyond that for me, because last night and over the past number of days, we were saying that Belfast is a welcoming place for visitors from across the world.

We know what Belfast is like in 2011 and what it will be like in 2012, but there are people across the world who do not know what Belfast is like now. It is a modern and welcoming city; a city full of culture; a city full of things to do and see. Therefore, it is difficult to quantify the value of last night. It was a fabulous event, and when things go well, we need to say that they have gone well and celebrate the fact that they have done so. I am very proud of the fact that Belfast held such a fabulous party last night and that all the visitors came and had a marvellous time.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin.

What steps is the Minister's Department taking to exploit the potential of traditional music, song and dance, be it of Scots or Irish origin, to attract tourists here. Will she support efforts to hold Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the all-Ireland music festival, here?

Mrs Foster: The Member has very clearly pointed out the overlap between ourselves and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in relation to music and, in fact, sport. The primary reason for many activities that take place may not be tourism, but they do, in fact, add to the tourism offering. We are very happy to work with DCAL on any events that may add to the cultural offering that we have here in Northern Ireland. Recently, we have looked at a lot of studies from Visit Britain, which carries out such studies, some of which

we commissioned. They have told us clearly that when people come to places such as Northern Ireland, they certainly do not come for the weather — although the weather played its part over the weekend — they come for an experience, and culture often plays a primary role in that experience. Therefore the richer the culture, the better it is for Northern Ireland.

Invest NI: East Londonderry

3. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, how much funding Invest NI has provided to small and medium-sized businesses in the East Londonderry constituency since April 2011. (AQO 678/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between 1 April and 30 September 2011, Invest NI offered assistance of almost £350,000 to small and medium-sized businesses in the East Londonderry constituency. As the Member for East Londonderry has pointed out, I have had the opportunity to see at first hand the vibrancy of the constituency's indigenous small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) base, having recently visited Farlow Engineering, which should be commended for its commitment to growth and development through a keen focus on innovation and export markets.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for her answer. What arrangements has Invest NI put in place to ensure that those individuals with an interest in starting their own businesses can have access to the relevant advice during the ongoing legal challenge for the award of the contract for the new business start programme?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated earlier in this Question Time session, we have put in place appropriate arrangements to respond to inquiries and to ensure that individuals with an interest in establishing their own businesses are able to access relevant advice and guidance during the period of delay resulting from the ongoing legal challenge. We have contacted directly, by e-mail or by letter, all the individuals on our database, and have followed that up with telephone calls giving them the relevant individual contacts in each of Invest Northern Ireland's regional offices.

Those people will also be able to provide advice and support. As I have already said, we will hold a series of business clinics and one-to-one meetings. We know that we are filling a gap at the moment, but that gap is being filled, and it wrong to say that it is not. It is, perhaps, not the best way to deliver the service, but it is the way that we must deal with it during the current impasse.

3.15 pm

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for her very positive answer and for the support that she gives to small businesses. Indeed, she pointed out earlier how important that is. She will, of course, be aware that a worrying number of small businesses are closing in East Derry, both in Coleraine and in Limavady. How does she propose to make surplus money in Invest Northern Ireland available to assist those small businesses that she said are important in creating jobs?

Mrs Foster: There are two issues there. The first is how we support the SME sector in what is becoming a more and more challenging situation. I talked about the difficulties that some in the sector are having in accessing finance. It is those companies that are the target of our Boosting Business initiative and the focus of our finance seminars. I think that one of those seminars is taking place in Coleraine, although I stand to be corrected. However, it is important that we get right down to those SMEs and get alongside them, so that they feel that we are there to give advice and assistance. That has always been my vision of Invest Northern Ireland; for it to allow us to really get down to those companies and to give them the assistance that they need.

The other issue addressed by the Member was the surplus finance in Invest Northern Ireland. The House was given the detail of that in the October monitoring round. Over £6 million of unforeseen receipts came into Invest Northern Ireland. The general downturn meant that some offers were not taken up, and we were unable to proceed with other offers that should have been given to companies because of difficulties with finance. I wish that I could have kept that money and rolled it into next year, and I wish that that money could have been kept in Invest Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, under what I think are Treasury rules, the money must be given back to the centre, and we wanted to give it back as quickly as possible so that other sectors and Departments could access it. I wish that we could have more flexibility

and that the money could be rolled into next year, and I am discussing that with the Finance Minister. An upturn in the economy or change in circumstances might mean that I would be bidding for money for Invest Northern Ireland, and it would be better if that money was already sitting there. I will need to have that technical discussion with the Finance Minister, but I wish that it was the case.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire.

What targets are in place for job creation in the East Derry constituency over the next four years?

Mrs Foster: There are no specific constituency targets. There are overall targets, which will be contained in the Programme for Government and in the economic strategy, on which we are making great strides. I hope that the strategy will be delivered at the same time as the Programme for Government, so that people can see the way in which we are addressing all the issues that have been mentioned in the House today.

Shale Gas Fracturing

4. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's policy on the granting of licences for shale gas fracturing. (AQO 679/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Rising energy prices and the uncertain security of supply are grave threats to our economy. Our policy is to facilitate the assessment of all energy supply options, including indigenous gas resources. We have licensed areas for exploration. However, that does not include any permission for deep drilling or associated engineering functions, including hydraulic fracturing, and any such application will be subject to consents from the relevant authorities. The consideration of applications, which are not expected for at least two years, will be informed by the relevant scientific studies in progress in the United Kingdom, Europe and elsewhere.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will the Minister confirm to the House that if shale gas production is a success here, the revenue will be ploughed back into Northern Ireland and not have to be handed over to the British Exchequer? In view of recent happenings across the water, where there was a mini earthquake, is there any fear in the Minister's heart that that could also happen in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: The mini-earthquake was felt, as I understand it, by one person. Very few people felt it. I want to say to the Member that the Select Committee in Westminster held an investigation into the extraction of shale gas through fracking, and it very clearly concluded that a moratorium on fracking was not justified. Some Members of this House have been calling for such a moratorium, which surprises me. Having said that, the same people are asking me to look for solutions to the problems of security of supply and rising electricity and gas prices, yet they call for a moratorium on fracking. The two do not sit together. It is time that people realised that they have to join the dots on energy policy. Sometimes, Members do not do that, and I have to say that it is hugely frustrating.

As I understand it, any royalties that come from fracking go back into the Westminster Exchequer. However, any jobs that are created will obviously benefit the local area. That is something that we would very much welcome. More jobs in the energy sector would be a very good thing for Northern Ireland. We should think of the security of supply that we would have if we had shale gas in Northern Ireland.

However, we are at a very tentative stage. Desk studies and what have you are being done at the moment. As I have always said, before any drilling or fracturing is done, a consent application has to be made to my Department and a planning application has to be made to the Department of the Environment (DOE). I would have thought that, obviously, an environmental impact assessment would also have to be done.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Looking at the problems of Nimbyism where the use of shale gas is concerned, what actions will the Minister take to educate the public about fracking and to ensure that it is safe?

Mrs Foster: I am certainly not getting at the Member who asked the question, but I hope that Members who look at one side of the story will acquaint themselves with the other side as well. I have often been asked for facts and evidence about fracking. The fact is that it has been happening across the United States now for some considerable time, and great benefits to areas have come from shale gas extraction. I

would welcome having our own supply of energy, albeit that we are still at a very early stage.

We in Northern Ireland certainly do not want a reputation of being Luddites who are afraid to move ahead or to look for new solutions. That is certainly something that I think that no one in this House will want to be associated with. *[Interruption.]* However, I hear that some Members want to be called Luddites, but that, of course, is a matter for them.

Mr Dunne: Can I ask the Minister what the potential is for shale gas fracturing throughout Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: Different shale gas resources have been found in Northern Ireland. I think that different ways of extracting the shale gas will be looked at. In County Antrim, the more traditional method of extracting gas is being looked at. If it would be of any use to him, I am happy to provide the Member with a map that would show him where it is thought that shale gas is available to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Agnew: I find it odd that the Minister might suggest that a fossil fuel is somehow modern. I am sure that she agrees with me that Fermanagh is a tremendous tourism destination. What does she perceive as the effect on the tourist industry should hydraulic fracturing be allowed to go ahead in Fermanagh?

Mrs Foster: Obviously, that would be addressed in any environmental impact assessment that the DOE carries out. However, I am sure that the Member would not suggest that we do not look for alternative supplies. Is it seriously the Green Party's suggestion that we do not look for alternative supplies? *[Interruption.]*

It is? Right, OK. So we will just sit in a dark room with a blanket over our heads and hope that it all goes away.

A Member: Turn the lights off.

Mrs Foster: Turn the lights off; yes, indeed.

It is absolutely amazing that people come to the Chamber and do not take the time to look at the security of supply that is there and available to the people of Northern Ireland. That is unbelievable. I spend ages looking for security of supply solutions for Northern Ireland and looking at ways to bring gas to the west and at ways to bring an alternative energy supply to the Northern Ireland people. Instead of doing that, the alternative from the Green Party is that we should sit in a dark room with a blanket over our heads and not worry about the situation.

Invest NI: Performance

5. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the performance of Invest NI, given that her Department had to surrender £17.5 million to the Department of Finance and Personnel in the October monitoring round. (AQO 680/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am entirely satisfied with Invest Northern Ireland's performance. The circumstances that gave rise to its reduced requirements in the recent October monitoring round were largely outside its control and were the result of business being unable to proceed according to plan. That was due to a number of factors, including project delay or abandonment and increased receipt generation. In the main, those are a consequence of the continued significant decline in business confidence arising from current market circumstances, the slower than expected economic recovery and a continued deterioration in market conditions.

Invest Northern Ireland has, in my view, acted responsibly on two accounts. First, it offered up the surplus budget early enough to allow the Executive to reallocate it across other pressing priorities. Secondly, it reacted quickly in response to the economic challenges by launching its Boosting Business initiative, which is focused on boosting employment, exports, R&D and skills.

Mr G Kelly: I thank the Minister for her answer, which I listened to carefully. If Invest NI had functioned to the proper standards, surely it would have foreseen that £17·5 million underspend and been able to move it. A number of Members spoke to you earlier about small and medium-sized enterprises, which are clearly greatly needed because they are the absolute backbone of business in the North.

Mrs Foster: The Member is right. SMEs are the "absolute backbone" of businesses in Northern Ireland. However, if I had reallocated that money, government procurement rules meant that it could not have been used in the Budget period. Therefore, the point that I made about having more flexibility about the Budget comes to the fore again. If I had been able to keep that money in an Invest NI account for longer, we

could have come up with ways of dealing with it more proactively. The reality is that, under the rules, money has to go back if it is not going to be used within a certain time.

I should also point out that Invest NI raised additional receipts, which generated an extra £6·25 million for the Executive. So, there is actually more money coming in than Invest NI received from the Executive. That is to the tune of £6·25 million, which is a not insignificant amount.

I think that it is wrong of the Member to say that we should have foreseen what is happening. Ask any economist out there whether they foresaw what is going on, given the position that we are in with the euro zone and what is happening in America. It is a very difficult time for us all. It is all very well after the event to say that we should have seen what was coming. Actually, nobody saw this coming in the first place back in 2008, so we are doing our best to forecast in what are very difficult circumstances. All that I will say to Invest NI is that it should be as proactive as possible in using the money that it has and it should try to use all the economic indicators that it has to forecast into the future. We are very much monitoring what is going on there at present.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes Question Time. I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments.

Private Members' Business

Pat Finucane Case

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

> *That this Assembly notes the British Government's acceptance that there was collusion by the army, the RUC and the Security Service in the murder of Pat Finucane; recognises that accepting collusion is not sufficient in itself and that the public now need to know the extent and nature of that collusion; and calls on the British Government to honour the binding commitment, made by the then British and Irish Governments in the Weston Park agreement, by establishing a judicial inquiry, as recommended by Judge Cory in 2004, with the power to compel witnesses to give evidence under oath. — [Mr A Maginness.]*

Which amendment was:

At end insert

> *"; and further calls on the British Government to establish this judicial inquiry within the next three months." — [Mr G Kelly.]*

Mr Poots: When we look back on the Troubles and at almost 4,000 deaths, it is very important that everyone in the House condemns every single one of those murders and indicates that every one of those deaths was wrong.

The murder of Pat Finucane was certainly wrong. It should not have happened, but it did, and his name has been added to the long list of people who lost their life as a consequence of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. I trust that we never go back to that situation. Many of the families of the almost 4,000 people who lost their life would look at today's debate with some bemusement because of the level of activity around and interest in this one murder. Why Pat Finucane but not the thousands of others who lost their life in Northern Ireland?

3.30 pm

The Finucane family and others have certainly driven a strong campaign to find all of the truth behind his death. Many others would love to find out the truth behind the death of their loved ones. Those families are working through the HET process and other processes, but they are having great difficulty in actually identifying everything that went on. I therefore believe that the demand that we go down a particular route for one particular individual and one particular murder is wrong, given where we are with the

situation that pertains to everyone in Northern Ireland. I think that that is particularly wrong given all that happened during the Troubles and, indeed, the role that Mr Finucane himself played. When we look at the Finucane family, we see a family that was not shy of controversy. The name Finucane was very well known in the period of the Troubles. In fact, during that period, there was a very famous Finucane who was to be extradited from the Republic of Ireland. That was a famous case. Of course, that Finucane transpired to be the brother of Pat Finucane.

Mr G Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. In talking about the death of Pat Finucane, which the Member condemned, is it in order for that Member to now try to attach some other excuse for the death by referring to other members of the Finucane family?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to keep on the point of debate when speaking.

Mr Poots: It is not surprising that Members do not like it when things do not go their way. Nonetheless, let us stick to the issues.

Mr A Maginness: This is a very important point. I accept the genuineness of the Member in condemning the death of Pat Finucane. On the other hand, he is suggesting that Mr Finucane was perhaps engaged in something else. It was very clear at the inquest into Pat Finucane's death that the RUC officer in charge of the investigation at the time said that there was absolutely no evidence to suggest that he was involved in any paramilitary organisation, in particular the IRA. It is accepted by almost every objective observer that he was simply a lawyer carrying out his work on behalf of clients, albeit that many of them were connected to the IRA or, indeed, other republican organisations.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Poots: I accept that the Member makes the case for Pat Finucane and his family and that he is very genuine about doing so. Nonetheless, if he accepts that information, does that mean that he accepts all of the information? Quite clearly he does not, given the fact that he brought the issue to the Floor today. Other information has certainly come to light since that time. Indeed, former members of the IRA have made statements about it and about their interaction with Pat Finucane while they were being cross-examined and while they were being questioned. The very clear premise of what is being said is that Pat Finucane was not acting purely as a solicitor representing individuals but as a solicitor acting for an organisation. That is something that makes it somewhat different in this particular case.

Ms J McCann: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it within Members' rights in the Chamber to use certain language and to make statements such as those that the Member has just come off with? It is outrageous to make those statements in the House. He has no evidence to back up what he says. My party objects strongly to what the Member is saying here today.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that they should be temperate and take care in everything that they say as best they can.

Mr McDevitt: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, can you define with absolute clarity the extent to which Members enjoy privilege in the House? Can you remind the House of the duty that we all have to uphold the good name of all citizens of these islands, whether they are still with us today or not?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that there is limited privilege in the House. If Members wish to explore that area further, I am happy to meet them or, indeed, to discuss the matter with the staff of the Speaker's Office.

Mr Poots: Members want to get real about the issue. What I am saying is already in the public domain. It has already been published in national newspapers. I am quoting a former member of the IRA who met and engaged with Pat Finucane. He engaged with him at IRA meetings. If Members do not like that, they should challenge the individual who actually said that it happened. A former member of the IRA stated that, not me. I was not at IRA meetings. He was, along with other members of the IRA.

People will be bemused as to why such a concerted effort is being made for that one individual when thousands of people in Northern Ireland did not receive justice; nor will they, given the current situation. We hear a lot about truth commissions. Perhaps, Members on the opposite Benches would like to tell the truth now. Perhaps, they would like to tell the House who was actually in the IRA and who engaged in which activities and pass that information to the police as is appropriate. If Mr Finucane

was involved, why do they not tell us what his involvement was? Others are happy to make that case. Others are clear about what actions and activities took place. Others are clear that, when they had Pat Finucane as their defence lawyer, it was not just about their case but about what information had been passed to the police.

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

Mr Poots: Many issues need to be brought out into the air today.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The previous contribution has brought a new low to discussions such as this. It seems to me to be a fairly obvious position that, if our unionist colleagues on the Benches opposite believe the outrageous allegations that have just been made, they would welcome an inquiry. It does not explain why they would use a petition of concern to prevent a ventilation of the facts — the facts, rather than scurrilous allegations that, it is clear, you are in no position to substantiate.

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

Mr McLaughlin: OK. I am directing my remarks at the author of the calumny that we were forced to listen to a short moment ago.

I want to make it clear that I speak in favour of the motion. It is a fine motion. My party's amendment is intended to strengthen it, given the amount of deliberate and strategic prevarication that there has been on the part of the British Government. The Assembly should set a timeline. Unionist colleagues who were at Weston Park should revisit the record. I can tell you this much: you did not object, either publicly or privately, to the inclusion of inquiries into the death of two RUC officers, the investigation into the death of Justice Gibson and his wife or the inquiry into the death of Billy Wright. Therefore, when you attempt to present a counterargument about elevating the case of Pat Finucane, you need to look a bit closer to home, folks. You were the people who introduced those elements. We did not object. My party's position all along is that there should be a universal right —

Mr Deputy Speaker: All remarks must be made through the Chair.

Mr McLaughlin: I am addressing my remarks through the Chair.

I make the point, because it is important, that we are, now, some considerable distance from the Good Friday Agreement. We are some considerable distance from the various negotiations and reviews that have happened. All of them emphasised the centrality of truth recovery to the process of reconciliation. If there is a sincere commitment to the recovery of the truth, we must deal with all of the truth. You cannot find all of the truth by asking some of the questions of some of the protagonists. You have to seek all the pieces of what can best be described as a mosaic of truth. We all have a contribution to make. My party has made that clear, and we have made a contribution by putting forward a proposition, but we are perfectly prepared to examine, with others, any other models that are presented to us.

What stands out in the Pat Finucane case is that the organisation of his murder, the procurement of the weapon that was used to kill him, the procurement of the getaway car, the planning and the intelligence that was used all involved agents of the Crown, the British army and the RUC special branch. That is a particular issue. I can understand why the British Government are ducking and weaving, but, if people in this House are interested in getting to the truth, we cannot go after some of the questions, be selective or say that, in particular, we do not want to look at the role of the British Government in the dirty war.

Mr Campbell: The first thing that should be said when discussing the murder of Pat Finucane is that it was a murder. Whatever his background or the views that he may or may not have held, whatever he may have said, whomsoever he may or may not have met, it was a murder. It was totally and utterly without justification, and, even this long after the event, if there is any information that can be turned into evidence, people should be brought before the courts for it. That is unequivocal and unambiguous, and it has been stated repeatedly down through the decades that have elapsed since his murder, unlike other murders and other instances, when people have been silent in their ambiguity. There will be no such ambiguity on this side of the House.

Unambiguous statements cut both ways. If people like one form of unambiguity, they should at least be prepared to tolerate it when we move into other territory. The proposer of the motion, Mr Alban Maginness from North Belfast, and the proposer of the amendment, Mr Gerry Kelly

from North Belfast, referred to matters that raise other issues. For example, Mr Maginness wanted to know whether collusion was strategic. That question almost begs an answer, a bit like other inquiries. People want a particular outcome, and they want the pieces of the jigsaw to fit the outcome that they have brought into play. The motion refers to "the murder of Pat Finucane", and Mr Kelly referred to other murders, but he then referred to the "killing" of Billy Wright. I took careful note of that. So Pat Finucane was murdered, but Billy Wright was just killed. I think we see the double standards.

We then move on in clear condemnation of the murder of Pat Finucane, but we need to ask serious questions, and my colleague asked some of them. The answers from across the Chamber appeared to bring us to the conclusion that some people do not like facing up to reality. Was Pat Finucane either in the IRA or consorting with the IRA?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask that all remarks be made through the Chair.

Mr Campbell: I will make them through the Chair. Just as we ask questions about other people in the Chamber today who were in the IRA. Some people are prepared to stand up and say that they are proud of the part they played. Others, of course — former and not-so-former Members of this place — are not sure whether they were in the IRA. One former exalted Member denies ever being in the IRA, but, of course, those Members want to be ambiguous when it suits them.

3.45 pm

The invitation of the Finucane family to Downing Street was also raised as an issue. The double standard goes beyond reason. If the Prime Minister had made up his mind that he was not going to proceed with an inquiry, a previous inquiry having already been offered to and rejected by the Finucane family, what would the reaction have been, had the family been told by telephone that there would not be an inquiry as they had requested? The howls of anguish would have been that the Prime Minister could not even tell them in person. When he brings them over to tell them in person, however, he is insulting them by doing so.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: I will, if I get an extra minute.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for allowing the intervention. The point has been made that the family were in negotiation with the NIO over a protracted period of, perhaps, a year. The model that was produced and discussed by the Government and the Finucane family, was the Baha Mousa model. That was introduced by the British Government. It was presented to the Finucane family as a means of resolving the deadlock. That shows that the Government were intent on some form of public inquiry. Why was the inquiry pulled at the last moment? That is the question to ask.

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

Mr Campbell: The Member asks a question, but he does not seem to deal with the issue of the previous offer of an inquiry, which was rejected by the Finucane family. An inquiry was offered; it was on the table and was rejected. The current Government had been in place for over a year, and the Secretary of State has made it repeatedly clear that he had been in discussions but they were going nowhere.

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

Mr Campbell: I will. The point that we have to come to is whether an inquiry is merited, and, if so, whether it will get to the truth. We did not get to the truth through the £200 million Saville inquiry, which lasted over a decade. Would we get to the truth of the Pat Finucane case? I really do not think so.

Mr Nesbitt: It is an inconvenient truth that the Finucane family had been offered and had rejected an inquiry and that the Government have produced an alternative. Sir Desmond de Silva will conduct a time-bound and budgeted inquiry. Many families who have lost loved ones look enviously at that offer. We should remember also that public inquiries, the Historical Enquiries Team and the Office of the Police Ombudsman are all means to an end, not an end in themselves. We have still not resolved for whose benefit we deploy those means. Is it for individuals, like the Finucane family, who are affected by Troubles-related incidents, or is it for society moving forward? Those are not always the same thing.

Mr Deputy Speaker, let me take you metaphorically on a visit to a widow who lives some 20 to 30 miles from the House. She

takes a phone call from an officer representing an organisation called the Historical Enquiries Team, of whom she has never heard before. She is aghast when the officer says that he is reviewing the murder of her first husband. She explains why she does not want that to happen: it was some 25 years ago, she has remarried, she has children by her second husband, she is now a grandmother, and she has moved on. She says that he cannot bring her first husband back and asks him to leave it. She is further aghast to be told that she has no right to stop the officer because it is his legal obligation to review the murder. He wonders whether she has any questions that she would like addressed; she says no and asks to be left out of the matter.

Sadly, human nature being what it is, when she realises some months later that the report has been completed she decides that she will read it after all. She reads that, as she thought, her husband went to work and a car pulled up. As she thought, a gunman got out of the back. As she thought, he fired several shots from point-blank range and her husband died. However, what she read was that what she had believed for 25 years — that her husband died falling to the ground — was not the truth. He lay on the ground for over 20 minutes, in agony, calling her name. Sometimes, the inquiries do not serve the interests of the individuals who have been most impacted by the past 40 years.

What we have is incomplete, imperfect and imbalanced. We are rewriting history, and we are doing so often in a way that portrays only the state and its agents as the villains. If we are to replace it with a complete process, it must be based on a trust that not only establishes the truth of what happened but does so in such a manner that individuals can accept that it is indeed the truth. It is not helpful when a man like Martin McGuinness claims to have left the IRA in 1974. Nobody believes him. It is not helpful when Gerry Adams says that he was never in the IRA. I cannot speak for Gerry Adams, but, had I found myself on an aeroplane in June of 1972, seen around me Martin McGuinness, Seán Mac Stíofáin, Dáithí Ó Conaill, Seamus Twomey and Ivor Bell and been told that I was going to talks with William Whitelaw, I might have put up my hand and said, "Excuse me, I'm not with these people".

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member return to the motion, please?

Mr Nesbitt: The point is that the motion is about one individual. It is important for the sake of all the other victims of the conflict that their opinions are aired in this and in all debates that the House conducts on these issues.

I shall finish where Mr Alban Maginness began this debate. He referred to 'Lost Lives' and the fact that the authors have identified 3,720 people who lost their life in a manner that was attributable to our conflict. You will not find the name of the father of Peter Heathwood in that book. Peter Heathwood was shot and seriously injured in a house in north Belfast in, I think, 1979. Somebody phoned his father, who, of course, rushed to the scene. Meanwhile, the Ambulance Service staff determined that they could not get Peter down the stairs on a stretcher because the house was too small. He was in urgent need of medical assistance, and they decided that the only way to get him to the ambulance was to put him in a body bag. That was how they carried him out of the upstairs of the house and into the ambulance. Unfortunately, his father arrived at the moment at which the body bag was carried out of the house. I cannot tell you whether that was the cause of his father's death, but I can tell you that he dropped dead of a heart attack at that point. I would like the House to acknowledge that Peter Heathwood's father is as much a victim as Pat Finucane. We should stop dealing —

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

Mr Nesbitt: — with Troubles-related deaths in isolation.

Mr McDevitt: Before I deal with the substantive issue of the motion, it would be useful to acknowledge that, as far as I am aware, the people of Derry believe that the Saville inquiry got to the truth of what happened on Bloody Sunday. Mr Nesbitt made a very honourable contribution about a woman who found herself unwillingly brought into a process of truth, but that is not the case in this situation. This is about a widow who has campaigned tirelessly for 23 years for the truth. She has successfully secured commitments from British and Irish Governments and all the political parties that are represented in the House for her right to uphold that truth.

The motion is before the House because I do not want to have to read words again from any widow who has campaigned for so long and

so honourably, words like those that Geraldine Finucane uttered on 12 October:

> *"My family will not be allowed to participate in this review. We will not be permitted to question witnesses. We will not be given copies of documents. In short, we are being asked to accept the result of a process from which we are completely excluded."*

We are debating this motion because several people in very powerful positions on behalf of two sovereign states made a commitment. That commitment is not being honoured.

It is not about who was in what organisation or about the bizarre relationship that dominates this House between the gentlemen — this afternoon, it is all gentlemen — sitting directly opposite and the ladies and gentlemen sitting to my right. It is about upholding the commitment of sovereign states and using the House to remind us all that that is something that we should all seek to do.

On 12 October, in response to Ms Ritchie, the Secretary of State said:

> *"Accepting collusion is not sufficient in itself. The public now need to know the extent and nature of that collusion."*

I am willing to give way, right here and right now, to anyone in the House who disagrees with that statement. Given Members' silence, nobody in the House questions the fact that there was collusion.

Ms Ritchie: In another place, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State accepted the fact that there was collusion. I am sure that Mr McDevitt will agree that, in accepting that fact, the British Government should have gone to the ultimate conclusion and brought about a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Ms Ritchie for her intervention. Nobody can disagree with the fact that there was collusion in the case of Pat Finucane. If they can, let them speak up, because I will give way to them at any time during my few minutes.

Mr Campbell: I am not asking to intervene to disagree, but will the Member agree that that was one of a number of cases of collusion? If we were to have a public inquiry into every case of every allegation of collusion or where there is evidence of it, where would we be? Of course, that collusion was only brought about by the armed campaign in the first place. How many dozens, scores or hundreds of inquiries would we need to have to accommodate the demand for inquiries on the basis of collusion?

Mr McDevitt: I think that we all appreciate Mr Campbell's remarks, and I think that Mr Campbell acknowledges the fact that there was collusion. To be fair to colleagues, as far as I have heard on all sides, they have pointed to the fact that everyone acknowledges that collusion did not take place only in the context of dead people from the Catholic or nationalist community. There was collusion on all sides, and collusion was a dirty, dirty game that was at the heart of a very dirty war. That reinforces the fact that such matters are deserving of inquiry. This case stands out not because it is more important than any others but because a family campaigned tirelessly and got two Governments to answer their campaign. Two Governments made promises, and those promises need and deserve to be met.

There is the broader question of the past, and I have only a tiny bit of time left. We must never allow the House to fall into the trap of doing nothing because we cannot do everything.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McDevitt: We must never allow ourselves to be the do-nothing brigade just because we cannot do everything.

Mr S Anderson: I speak in opposition to the motion, because it displays all of the blinkered characteristics that have so long marked the SDLP on such matters. I oppose the amendment because it merely confirms Sinn Féin's warped attitude to justice.

Recently, we debated a motion that called on the Secretary of State to convene talks on the past. The SDLP could not let it pass off in that way, so it tabled an amendment that sought to introduce the Dublin Government as some benign onlooker able to act as an honest broker in such matters. However, Dublin is far from squeaky clean. There is a trail of blood and death that leads to its door over its role in the formation of the Provisional IRA. The SDLP is not interested in that; its sole obsession seems to be the wrongs, real or perceived, of the United Kingdom.

Mr McDevitt: Will Mr Anderson give way?

Mr S Anderson: I have too much to get through.

Today, the SDLP is showing its inability to look closely or see clearly.

For when it came to the motion, the SDLP could turn its attention only to the United Kingdom. The SDLP, out of loyalty or duty, restricted its comments on Dublin to ones that cast it in a positive role.

4.00 pm

Murder is murder, including that of Pat Finucane, whatever his politics or background, and whatever suggestions have been made about him by those who were once involved with the Provos. Sadly, however, it seems that in the eyes of the SDLP and other nationalists and republicans, some murders are more serious than others and more worthy of high-level investigation.

Pat Finucane was not the only solicitor killed during the Troubles. I am a member of the DUP, but I have not forgotten the many good people who were my colleagues in the UUP. I think of Edgar Graham, who was murdered in cold blood and in broad daylight in the precincts of Queen's University on 7 December 1983, when he was only 29 years of age. No one has been brought to book for that. I still recall Gerry Adams's insult to Edgar's colleagues and friends when he accused them of crocodile tears. Edgar's name is never mentioned by those on the Benches opposite. Edgar Graham was a young and very able academic lawyer. He was murdered by the IRA, the very organisation that elements of the Irish Government helped to form, finance, train, arm and shield. Dublin's bloodstained fingerprints are all over that brutal murder. I refer to Edgar as an example of a member of the legal profession. There are many other unsolved murders but we want justice for all, not just the select few.

I was greatly moved by the fifth annual silent walk to the steps of this Building by the families of those who were carted away by republican thugs. Some families still do not know where their loved ones are buried or what happened to them in their final hours. Surely the families of the disappeared, especially those whose bodies have yet to be found, deserve to know the truth and to have justice.

Let us also not forget Captain Robert Nairac. Let us have some justice for his family, or is that the preserve only of high-profile republican lawyers? When it came to this motion, the SDLP could have done the right thing and not differentiated between murders, but it could not bring itself to do so, and it has failed.

Sinn Féin, of course, is going to use this debate to justify itself, but it will not succeed. It throws dirt at others but will not answer legitimate and reasonable questions about its members' own pasts. Its candidate for President of the Irish Republic just proved that recently. He did not like being asked about his past. He was even reluctant to admit that people such as Jean McConville were murdered. His evasion turned to anger as he was questioned, and his mask of reason and politeness, which he likes to wear in public, slipped badly on quite a few occasions during the election campaign. Congratulations to those in the media and the people of the Irish Republic who saw through him and his party.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we return to the motion, please?

Mr S Anderson: This is Sinn Féin, inextricably linked to an organisation that was behind a brutal sectarian murder campaign and an organisation that continues to deny truth and justice for hundreds of families, including those of the disappeared, who were, as I said, at Stormont a few days ago. Sinn Féin has no grounds to lecture anyone here today.

Let us not forget all the innocent victims who were brutally slaughtered and maimed by the killing machines of the various terrorist organisations during the long years of the Troubles. Their families continue to suffer, often quietly and out of the limelight —

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

Mr S Anderson: They, too, deserve justice. I oppose the motion and the amendment.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an leasaithe agus ar son an rúin.

I will be speaking on behalf of the Sinn Féin amendment and in support of the motion tabled by Alban Maginness and his party colleagues.

We put in the amendment calling on the British Government to initiate this inquiry within three months because we do not want this to become what it has been — a long-finger issue.

This is an issue that should be addressed, and addressed immediately. I concur with the remarks made by Alban Maginness leading and by Gerry Kelly in tabling the amendment.

I want to place on record my absolute disgust. I notice now that Edwin Poots has left the Chamber — and, indeed, the comments made by Gregory Campbell —

Mr S Anderson: I haven't.

Mr McCartney: I know you haven't.

Those remarks are very much in line with those once made in the British Parliament by Douglas Hogg. Many people attributed those words, similar to those that we have heard here this afternoon, as laying the grounds for the death of Pat Finucane.

A number of facts have emerged that seem to be growing in currency. However, the fact remains that the British Prime Minister has accepted, on behalf of the British Government, that that Government, through their agents and agencies, were responsible for the death of Pat Finucane. That stands without question. Those agents were members of the RUC Special Branch, paid informers, members of the Ministry of Defence and the Military Reconnaissance Force, and included Members of the British Cabinet.

Any person would think that once a British Prime Minister had been forced into accepting that point, those who talk about the British Government and their upholding of democracy would take the lead in ensuring that there was an inquiry. Anyone would think that they would try to discover the extent of the British Prime Minister's acceptance that his Government, his agents and his agencies were responsible in the death of Pat Finucane, which has been described here today by everyone as "murder". Why would the British Government not want to initiate an inquiry into who was responsible, who covered up what and why? It is important that we could find out the reasons why, bearing in mind that the British Government have not and will not do so.

The British Government have insulted the Finucane family over this. Mitchel McLaughlin pointed out what happened at Weston Park. Over the past days, I have looked over press releases that were issued in the aftermath of the discussions at Weston Park and found no dissenting unionist voice. Neither the Ulster Unionists nor the Democratic Unionists said that there should not be an inquiry, because the test was laid out by the two Governments. It was agreed that a judge of international repute would decide.

David Ford read out two paragraphs of the report, one of which stated clearly:

> *"In the event that a Public Inquiry is recommended in any case, the relevant Government will implement that recommendation."*

That is what the people signed up to after Weston Park; there were no dissenting voices, yet the British Government are reneging.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: No; I am not giving way.

Mr Campbell: I thought not.

Mr McCartney: I want to make this point to those who say that inquiries are a waste of time: when the Minister of Justice in the Dublin Government tried to circumvent the process around the inquiry into the deaths of Buchanan and Breen, the unionists were the first to say, quite rightly, that, in the interests of justice, he should not do that. We agreed, because if it is agreed that a public inquiry should take place, it should take place. The unionists did not queue up to say that inquiries should be stopped, they were a waste of money, they were not needed, or that the process was elevating one death above another. They quite rightly said that the interests of justice needed to be served, and the inquiry had to run its full course.

The Finucane family has been asking for that since day one; that is what the British Government and the Irish Government asked for when they put the test in front of Cory. Both Governments said that if Cory said that there should be an inquiry, there should be an inquiry. That is not an elevation. That is fulfilling the solemn promise of two sovereign Governments. The British Government were forced into a position where the British Prime Minister, and I will say it again —

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

Mr McCartney: I say it to all those unionists who see the British Government as their Government: they were forced into accepting that the British Government, their agents and

their agencies were responsible for the death of Pat Finucane.

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

Mr McCartney: People such as Douglas Hogg, Gregory Campbell and Edwin Poots will not stop — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up. Order.

Mr McCartney: They will not stop the Finucane family getting — *[Interruption.]*

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

Mr Eastwood: In proposing the motion, Alban Maginness referenced 'Lost Lives'; he mentioned the 3,720 people killed — murdered — in this part of the world, from every section of our community. He did not say that one murder was more important than another. However, he made the point that this particular murder is exceptional in that it highlights the fact of collusion in this society.

More needs to be done to discover the full truth behind Pat Finucane's murder. Was it strategic? Was it policy? As Mr Maginness said, Lord Stevens stated in 2003 that it was collusion, that the murder could have been prevented and that the killers could have been caught. Peter Cory said that it was collusion. The British Government have now appointed Sir Desmond de Silva. As Mr Maginness pointed out, he is very probably an honourable man. However, the fact is that it is just Cory II and unable to compel witnesses.

As Mr Maginness said in his opening remarks, Mr Cameron was completely cynical and cruel to the Finucane family in bringing them to London to deny them what they had already been promised by Members of this House, the British Government and the Irish Government.

Mr Gerry Kelly paid tribute to the Finucane family's courage and determination and talked about them being lured to Downing Street. He said that it is not about money but that it is a symbolic case. He said that he hopes that there will be truth for all families, which is a commendable standpoint. Collusion was used across the board, as Mr Kelly said. Unionists should not be afraid of the truth. In fact, no one in the House should be afraid of the truth.

Mr Girvan asked what was so special about Pat Finucane. He said that we are rewriting history. We are not rewriting history. All that we are trying to do is to get to the full facts of history. I do not know what anyone in the House has to fear from the truth. Certainly, no one on these Benches has anything to fear from that.

Mr McCrea said that it is a divisive motion. In our view, it does not have to be divisive. No one on these Benches from my party will argue against the fact that murder was wrong in every single case, no matter who carried it out or who the victim was. I agree with Mr McCrea that we need to find a mechanism to get to the truth. We have called for that constantly and continually in the House and elsewhere, but the fact of the matter is that we cannot let that stand in the way of getting to the truth in this particular case.

Like others, Minister Ford made the point that, at Weston Park, the two Governments made a solemn promise to the Finucane family. They have let that family down.

Mr Poots asked why Pat Finucane? We make the point that everyone deserves truth, but this is an opportunity for the Finucane family. A promise was made but not fulfilled. He moved on to use very dangerous language, and I make this point very deliberately. Many people in this society were killed as a result of that kind of language in places such as this. I hope that, in future, Mr Poots will approach such matters with a greater sense of respect and maturity.

Mr McLaughlin was right when he said that Mr Poots had reached a new low. He said that unionists should welcome an inquiry to discover the full truth behind this murder. If he has any issues with Mr Finucane, surely those will come out in the inquiry.

Thankfully, Mr Campbell accepts that Mr Finucane's death was murder. He talked about double standards. There are no double standards on this side of the House; I am not so sure about the other. He moved on to talk about the Saville report, which he has talked about many times. Once again, Mr Campbell finds himself out of step not only with the people of Derry, the First Minister, a British law lord and Protestant Church leaders in Derry but with the British Prime Minister. It is time for Mr Campbell to catch up on the issue. Some day he will.

Mr Nesbitt gave a moving account of a widow's story. As I said, we agree that a mechanism for truth recovery needs to be found. However, as Mr McDevitt said, that should not be a reason to stop now. We are the party that calls for a truth recovery process and processes. As Mr Nesbitt knows very well, there is no one-size-fits-all process. The bottom line is that this is an opportunity to find not just some of the truth but the whole truth behind this murder. I do not know why anyone would not support that.

Mr McDevitt paid tribute to Geraldine Finucane, who has campaigned tirelessly for the truth of her husband's murder. The promise made by the two Governments needs to be fulfilled.

Mr Anderson talked about the hurt felt by others during the Troubles. Nobody from my party has said any different: we agree that all victims of the Troubles must have their needs met. I do not see the problem in meeting the needs of the Finucane family.

4.15 pm

The bottom line, folks, as Mr McCartney agreed, is that the British Government should agree to an inquiry. Why would they not agree to an inquiry? What are they afraid of? The bottom line is that there was collusion in this murder, and the full truth needs to be found. A solemn promise was made to a grieving widow and her family. That promise should be delivered upon.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that a valid petition of concern regarding the motion and the amendment was presented today. According to Standing Orders, there can be no vote on the same day, so the votes on the motion and the amendment will occur first thing tomorrow.

Aggregrates Levy

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

Mr Frew: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly recognises the imminent danger to the quarrying industry if the EU Commission decides to require a recovery of the aggregates levy rebate from 2004; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make urgent representations to the EU president and the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting that no recovery order is made.*

I take great pleasure in proposing this cross-party motion. The aggregates and quarrying industry faces a future that is far from certain. Not only is it facing the cold reality of the recession and what that has meant for the wider construction industry, and not only is it facing the brutal reality of the coalition Government-imposed cuts to the capital budgets of our Departments, but it has had to factor in the suspension of the aggregates levy credit scheme on 1 December 2010. That suspension saw an immediate increase in the aggregates levy in Northern Ireland from 40p per ton to £2 per ton. There has been a 500% increase in tax and a 40% increase in the price of stone. That increase in the aggregates levy has further damaged the industry and increased construction costs across the Province at a time when our economy needs a revitalised construction industry to help to generate economic growth.

The credit scheme was put in place because of Northern Ireland's unique position and the fact that the aggregates levy of 2002 had put firms in Northern Ireland in a more difficult than expected competitive position. That resulted in the April 2004 introduction of the credit scheme, which granted an 80% relief to producers who entered into environmental agreements with the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment. We have debated this matter on several occasions over the years. Let me remind Members that this was not money for nothing; it was not a savings plan or a relief just for the sake of it. The credit scheme was very much needed in Northern

Ireland at that time, and I would argue that it is still needed today.

In the period when the aggregates levy credit scheme operated, environmental compliance in the quarry industry improved significantly. Indeed, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency water management unit recently published data for 1 August 2010 to 31 July 2011, which showed compliance at 96·4%.

That was, of course, excellent news for the industry and Northern Ireland, and it demonstrated the commitment to continuous improvements in environmental management that our quarrying industry took upon itself, through this scheme, to implement. That was not easy for our industry to do. It cost a lot of money.

The European Court decision of 9 September 2010 that the European Commission had not carried out a proper state assessment of the Northern Ireland credit scheme forced Her Majesty's Treasury to suspend the scheme on 1 December 2010. The aggregates industry in Northern Ireland had a legitimate expectation that the aid was lawful and acted accordingly. Our industry went into the scheme in good faith. It did nothing wrong. It implemented changes in its routines and practices, and that cost a lot of money. I argue that the money saved through the relief scheme was pumped back into the industry in order to qualify for the grant scheme itself. If you look at what the industry in Northern Ireland had to pay, compared with other places in the UK, just to apply for that grant, you can see how important it was to our industry at that time.

Now, with the extra burden of the full levy — remember that the credit scheme took away 80% of that levy — our industry has to pay it all. I quoted the figures: duty rose from 40p a ton to £2 a ton. That was a 500% increase in tax, and it gave rise to a 40% increase in the price of stone. Now, with all that having taken place and with guarantees that Her Majesty's Government will look at a replacement scheme for our industry, Europe is contemplating forcing Her Majesty's Government to recoup that money from our industry. That would be an absolute disaster for our quarrying and aggregates industry.

Of course, I am ever the optimist, and I hope that it does not get to that point. We bring the motion before the House today so that we can apply pressure now on the people responsible for this: Europe and Her Majesty's Government. If we make sure that we apply that pressure now, hopefully, we will not have to debate this matter should a decision be made that falls on the wrong side of our industries.

Of course, this is all about a challenge made by the industry that imports aggregates into Northern Ireland, but that has always been minimal anyway. This is where we have to be careful. There is a risk that the European Commission will ask for the money to be given back. The estimated sum is £250 million to £300 million. Name one industry in this Province that could take a hit like that. I can tell you now that our quarrying industry could not.

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

If Her Majesty's Government were to impose that order and reclaim the money that was paid out through a scheme that was set up in good faith and implemented by our quarrying industry in good faith — money that was not saved but put back into the industry — that would completely change the face of the industry as we know it. It would destroy family-run, independent quarrying companies in Northern Ireland. Indeed, it is doubtful even that the larger companies could withstand such a recovery order.

That is why it is so important that the House, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister, speak to the people who are responsible for this so that we can alleviate the problem before it is upon us and convince them that reclaiming that money is not the way to go. In fact, the Assembly and the Executive should push to have a new credit scheme put in place as soon as possible to give relief to our quarrying industry, which has implemented environmental improvements to the best of its ability and better than any other region of the UK.

I believe that the recovery of state aid would be in breach of the legitimate expectations of quarry operators in Northern Ireland. If a recovery order were made, it may distort trade and competition and, therefore, be contrary to EU laws. The issue has to be thoroughly thought out so that our industry is not left with the uncertain future that is hanging over its head. It will affect not only our quarrying industry but the wider construction industry, which will affect our economy. If a rebate recovery is imposed, we will be unable to recover at the speed at which we want. It will totally destroy the quarrying industry, which in turn could destroy what is left of a construction

industry that is already on its knees and looking for recovery in any way that it can.

I appeal to the House to support the motion. I have no reason to believe that Members will not support it or that the people whom we are tasking to speak and lobby on our behalf will not do that. The motion is in the interests of all parties, of Northern Ireland as a whole and of our economy. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Kinahan: I congratulate all those who tabled the motion and members of the quarry industry in Northern Ireland, who have maintained a high level of publicity on the issue of a rebate recovery. We all need to pull together to make sure that what we are asking for in today's motion actually happens.

Members have already heard that the danger of the rebate is £250 million-plus and that it would completely kill the industry. We need to keep that in mind. The motion calls for pressure to be put on the EU president and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make sure that no rebate is required, and we must all make sure that that does not happen. It is never right to go back two, three, four or five years to claw back money from an industry or a business that has been following the law. We cannot change the rules and go backwards.

Members have heard a little about the aggregates levy, why it was raised and the sums of money involved. The aggregates levy was established to make sure that the quarry industry helped the environment, whether that concerned noise, dust, living next door to a quarry, helping to recycle or habitats. It was all done with the best intentions. However, it was also done because the quarry industry south of the border had no tax levy and so could charge much less. It was established to give ourselves a fairer chance to trade across the water. We must keep that in mind at all times.

I praise the people in the quarry industry who, in my case, helped the quarry at Parkgate with peregrine falcons and newts and turned it into a better rural landscape for the public. In other quarries, they have created fishing and other rural habitats. We must bear in mind that the levy and the entire system worked.

I want to raise one query today. The issue was taken to the EU General Court, which found that the exemption from the aggregates levy was unfair. At the back of my mind, I recall that two Irish companies that worked with English companies stated that it was unfair. There is no levy in Ireland, so surely quarry operators can charge even less for their aggregates as they move them across the water. I want their links with English companies to be examined. The issue needs to go back to Europe to be thoroughly checked so that there is fairness for both sides.

4.30 pm

Today's motion calls for putting pressure on the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the president of the EU. We should expand that slightly; it should be pressure on all the MPs, because all the MPs in that other place should understand this issue. We should put particular pressure on the MEPs, particularly those from across the water on the mainland, and there should also be pressure on the Irish Government. We should put pressure on our North/South bodies so that we get a system that works and so that we do not have a difference on either side of the border. Maybe there could be a tax there and something that benefits their environment. We need to put pressure on the industry itself so that the whole industry, not just here in Northern Ireland, is singing off the same hymn sheet.

Today's motion asks for urgent action, by which we mean action in the next week or month and not what seems to be the habit in many places of government, where things are slowed up, take ages and nothing actually happens. The industry and jobs are at risk today, and numbers have gone down from 5,000 to some 3,700. Those jobs, the aggregates industry, the quarry industry and the construction industry will build our schools, hospitals and roads. If we make it too expensive, that building work will not happen, and other companies will come here to build our schools. That may not mean that we get the best of the employment. So, I fully support the motion. We need urgent action and pressure on the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the President of the EU and all the others I mentioned.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As I speak, I also do so as chair of the all-party working group on construction. Two of the Members who spoke previously are on that group, and Mr McElduff will speak later to wind up on this. The issue has been drawn to our attention time and

again by people involved in the quarrying sector in particular. I share the concerns of other Members in the Chamber. In our constituency, Mr Deputy Speaker, unemployment levels have crept up and, in fact, the number of people claiming jobseeker's allowance has almost trebled. That means hard times in the construction sector, and I have no doubt that many of those people are associated with and dependent upon the quarrying sector, which, as Mr Frew quite rightly said, has been dealt a body blow by the aggregates levy issue.

One important point must be made: the partial exemption of 80% was not available to all those aggregates producers. There seems to be a perception that that was the case. It was available only to those companies that entered into and, indeed, were in compliance with environmental agreements. The objective of that was to obtain significant environmental improvements and sustainability, and that should not go unread and unnoticed here. It is not simply a case of ticking a few boxes to up the profits at the end of the year. There was an environmental consequence and direct benefit of this, and some of us have been out to see those direct benefits around quarry pits. We saw them for what they were: genuine efforts where government worked very closely — indeed, the Department of the Environment saw that, too — and derived the direct benefits of it.

In Northern Ireland, the effect of the suspension of the aggregates levy credit scheme on the quarrying industry, the construction industry and the wider economy is drastic, particularly in rural areas and especially in some of those border areas. The impact on construction budgets is significant, and I have the briefing notes in front of me. On average, we produce around 24 million tons of aggregates in Northern Ireland every year. Allowing for the exemptions, the total taxable tonnage is approximately 21 million. Levy payments to HMRC at the reduced level were in the region of £8·4 million per annum. Now that Northern Ireland has failed to gain EU Commission approval for the continued use of the derogation, we will pay £44 million per annum to the Treasury based on our stone usage. Government — that is, Ministers and Departments in our Executive — procure 60% of construction work in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the actual cost to the public purse as a consequence of the removal of the levy credit scheme will be £26 million per annum.

Many of us have been here to debate budgets, capital works schemes, new schools, hospitals or roads, or whatever it might be. However, that is an awful lot of construction work that has been withdrawn at the stroke of a pen. It is a big dent in the budget just to pay tax.

There is also the other implication, which is that it is a further £26 million that is not being spent in the economy on employing people. I am sure that there are people more than adequately qualified in the Chamber to say that that £26 million and its employment of people means that less money will be paid in tax. My initial point was that many of those people in our constituencies — our family, our friends and our neighbours — are now claiming jobseeker's allowance at an additional cost to the Exchequer. I am sure that there are statisticians and accountants who can work that out. It is not a good decision either for the economy or the Exchequer. Someone needs to get a grip on it and to start presenting figures that can be readily understood for the benefit of the community.

Yes, we share a land border, and maybe some of us do not agree that that land border should be there. However, we share a land border with another EU state where a similar aggregates tax does not exist. The price of stone was £4·29 a ton in 2009. The aggregates levy at its full rate represents 49% of that. Can we endure a construction material cost increase of up to 49%? We certainly can not.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McGlone: The Assembly is duty-bound to send the clear message that we must do this in the interests of the quarry industry, the construction industry and the wider community.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): The previous Committee took a great interest in the aggregates levy scheme. The Committee supported the approach of the levy scheme and recognised that the proactive measures conducted as a result of the scheme delivered more on the ground than might have been achieved from a tax alone. Members were in favour of retaining the scheme and wrote to the Department of Finance and Personnel on several occasions to emphasise that support.

The representative industry group, the Quarry Products Association Northern Ireland (QPANI),

has stated that since the introduction of the levy scheme, there has been a significant improvement in the environmental performance of the industry. Operators also feel that the scheme is creating a level playing field, and they welcome the fact that others, who they felt were not up to standard, had to improve and maintain their performance. QPANI states that the reasons why state aid was approved for the scheme in 2004 have not changed. QPANI, like the Committee, was, and continues to be, a strong advocate of the scheme.

The Committee is, therefore, concerned about the loss of the scheme. However, members are even more concerned about the possibility of the EU's requiring aggregates suppliers in Northern Ireland to pay back money lost by the EU through the scheme. QPANI estimates the potential cost of that at between £250 million and £300 million. As I am sure you appreciate, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, that would have a detrimental effect on the quarries in Northern Ireland, and it could put their businesses at risk.

Mr Wells: The Member said that it would have a detrimental effect. Many of us believe that it could close the industry. There is not £200 million to £300 million in the quarrying industry. There might be that level of debt, but there is certainly not £200 million to £300 million lying in bank accounts to pay it. Therefore, what does the industry do?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Lo: Thank you. I was about to say that it might even put some operators out of business altogether. That is something that we can ill afford in the current financial climate. The House should unite to do all that it can to support the quarry industry on the issue. On behalf of the Committee for the Environment, I support the motion.

Mr Wells: I support the motion, and I am pleased to see that it seems to have the unanimous support of the House. I wish to declare several interests. I sat on a QPANI committee, albeit briefly. It looked at the very issue of biodiversity and environmental protection in quarries. I have also done some limited consultancy work in quarries over the past 30 years as a result of my chairmanship of the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group.

I see the industry facing three major attacks at the moment. First, there has been a huge reduction in demand for its products. Even if the aggregates levy issue had not arisen, the quarry industry would be having a dreadful time. Many of the quarries that I visit are on 50% of the output that they had five years ago. Some of them are closed, some are mothballed, and almost all of them have made significant redundancies. So, there is that problem.

Secondly, as Mr Frew outlined, the industry has had the burden of the recent implementation of an increase in the aggregates levy from 40p to £2.00 a ton. The problem that arose when that was originally suggested was the impact that it would have on the quarry industry in border areas, because if quarry producers in the Irish Republic do not have the levy, they can, obviously, import product into Northern Ireland and undercut the market here. It was, therefore, assessed that industry producers within a 30-mile radius of the border could not survive the implementation of the levy. I remember a time when Mr Durkan, I think, was the Finance Minister — that is going back quite a long time — and there was an all-party battle to achieve the reduction in the levy to 40p. There was full, all-party support for that. At that time, it was one of the victories of the Assembly that we were able to achieve that major benefit for our industry.

Thirdly, on top of all that, we now find that there is a hint that there may be an attempt to recoup the entire £250 million to £300 million from the industry in Northern Ireland. I accept that it is only a suggestion, but suggestions of doom and gloom ahead have an awful habit of coming up to bite you later. I believe in heading off such problems at the pass, before they start to grow legs. We need to put down a firm marker that the industry simply cannot afford that. As I said in my intervention to Mrs Lo, there is absolutely no doubt that if that bill arrived at the door of most of the quarries and sandpits in Northern Ireland, it would close them down. The only £250 million to £300 million that is in the industry at the moment is debt owed to the banks. There is not the money, because life has been so difficult. Maybe in the boom times, when things were going well, we might have had the money to pay it off, albeit in instalments, but we do not have it now. It is an absolute disaster.

What aggrieves me about this, as someone who has an interest in the environment — in fact,

one of the very few people in the Chamber who have an interest in the environment — is that going round the quarries —

Mr Wilson: I think that is a bit harsh.

Mr Wells: I certainly do not think that Mr Wilson has any interest in the environment.

I have noticed a dramatic improvement in the environmental quality of our quarrying industry in Northern Ireland. It has spent an absolute fortune in implementing its part of the deal. The deal was this: we will reduce your aggregates levy to 40p if you come up to the highest environmental standards. The quarries have delivered. QPANI appointed an environmental officer. Her job was to advise the quarry industry on how to improve on issues such as water quality, screening, dust, noise and biodiversity. The industry has spent hundreds of thousands of pounds delivering that, to the extent that very few complaints are received now from local neighbourhoods about the environmental impact of their local quarry. Things were moving in the right direction; the industry has delivered. In fact, the difference is very stark: simply by visiting a quarry, you can tell the difference between those who are signed up to environmental improvements in conjunction with QPANI and those who do not bother. It is like night and day.

Having spent all that money and delivered, surely it is a real kick in the teeth for the industry to be told, first, we are not going to continue the lower levy at 40p, and, secondly, we are going to come back after you for the £250 million that we agreed not to charge you. That is absolutely crazy.

The other issue that needs to be highlighted by Members who represent rural constituencies is that the quarrying industry is often the only alternative source of employment for many rural communities. In South Down, the sand industry, in particular, around Kilkeel and quarrying companies in areas such as Castlewellan and Warrenpoint are very important employers, particularly for manual labour. To be honest, if those industries closed because of this sleight of hand by the EU, we will lose a large number of people who are gainfully employed and working hard for their communities. What sort of crazy system do we have in place that allows that to happen?

4.45 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Wells: I support the motion entirely, and I hope that we can do something to help the industry.

Mr Byrne: I also support the motion. I remember being involved in a debate like this about 12 years ago. It is fair to say that as an MLA for West Tyrone, I know that the constituency is highly dependent on the quarrying and sand industry. I am also acutely aware of the number of people whom the industry employs. Towns such as Strabane, Dunnamanagh, Newtownstewart, Drumquin, Ederney, Carrickmore, Greencastle, Gortin, Plumbridge and Derrylin all depend on quarrying. The quarrying industry in Tyrone also gave rise to a substantial engineering industry, and the production of quarrying equipment originated because we have a quarrying industry. So, it is crucial for our part of the world.

I agree that the £250 million reclaim would be a disaster. It would mean that most of the aggregates and, indeed, the sand and gravel quarries, would close. We have a collective duty to make sure that a strong case is made against the reclaim. Tyrone and Fermanagh are beside the border, and we would be at an immediate competitive disadvantage if the reclaim were enacted.

I agree that the full implementation of the quarries tax as it is would make it virtually impossible to run a quarry. Quarry owners feel hammered by government. Look at the price of red diesel. Those who drive diggers or have diggers or other machinery in quarries are being hammered by the high costs of red diesel. Lorries are another example: the 25-ton lorries that deliver aggregates run at seven miles to the gallon at a cost of £6·40 a gallon. Those prices are crucifying the industry. Indeed, I raised in the House recently how the road haulage industry is being severely handicapped in Northern Ireland. The quarry owners feel that they are being severely handicapped by government taxes and by customs and excise duties. That is another reason why we must lobby strongly to ensure that the reclaim does not happen.

I congratulate the Quarry Products Association and its regional director, Gordon Best. It has

done a tremendous job in the past 10 years of lobbying on the issue and has reflected the concerns of everyone involved in that industry and in the construction industry.

As my colleague Patsy McGlone said, unemployment has risen a lot in rural areas. Jim Wells referred to the same issue. If the quarries were to close, many more people would be doing manual jobs. That is because the jobs of those who drive the lorries, diggers and shovels in quarries would all go, and that would put us in the border areas at a severe economic disadvantage.

I support the motion, and I think that if we keep at it collectively, a strong case can be made. The quarry owners and the Quarry Products Association feel severely hammered by government because of the amount of tax that they must pay.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Members for tabling the motion on what is a very important issue for the construction sector in Northern Ireland. I also note and welcome the cross-party support that is evident in the list of sponsors of the motion.

In Newry and Armagh, the quarrying industry employs a lot of people, and it is a valuable part of our local economy. I can think of a number of companies in my constituency alone that are involved in quarrying directly and of many more that are involved in retailing aggregates for building, gardening and tarmac laying, etc. They, in turn, provide vital employment that sustains the local economy in the area.

With the current dip in the construction industry, those involved in the sector, including those involved in the supply of materials to the sector, are already having a very tough time. The economic environment that the industry is working in could not be tougher, particularly when you consider the relentless rise in the cost of energy, on which the quarrying industry is heavily reliant from the start of the process to the finished product. Operators are spending huge amounts on fuel and electricity to extract, process and deliver products.

In this tough economic environment, the key message for the Government, both locally and at Westminster, has been about the need to stimulate the economy. The suspension of the aggregates levy credit scheme earlier this year was a significant blow to the aggregates industry, and the possible recovery of the rebate would have the reverse effect to stimulating the sector. It would be disastrous.

Quarries in my constituency have invested heavily in their operations. A lot of money has been spent on environmental improvements to sites, which were part of the terms and conditions of the aggregates levy credit scheme.

I fully understand the industry's concerns. If a recovery request were to be made, firms would effectively be paying twice. That is a situation that must not be allowed to happen. As the Quarry Products Association rightly pointed out, the industry in Northern Ireland entered into the scheme in good faith and in the knowledge that the Commission had granted approval of it. Based on that, operators invested significantly, as I said. It is, therefore, incumbent on the Treasury to ensure that no recovery order is made, and the Chancellor must do all in his power to resist an order from the EU for recovery. As was said, that recovery is estimated to be in the region of £250 million to £300 million. It is obvious that such a recovery would be absolutely crippling to the industry. It would be simply too much to bear.

I support the motion and urge our First Minister and deputy First Minister to make strong representations to the Chancellor and to the EU President and to impress upon them the severe ramifications that the recovery order would have on the quarry industry in Northern Ireland, and also the detrimental effect that such a recovery would have on the construction sector, which is already under strain.

To quote the Quarry Products Association director, Gordon Best:

> *"we need to see crucial decisions taken quickly that put businesses first and action that facilitates real economic growth and job creation."*

Those are timely comments, and I believe that a decision not to proceed with a recovery order would be very welcome to quarries across Northern Ireland. That is the immediate goal that we must now work towards. I fully support the motion.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue. It is significant that this is a cross-party motion, because the suspension of the aggregates levy credit scheme and the threat of the rebate that could follow from it, is not, and never should become, a party political

issue. I hope that the Assembly's opinion will be noted by the European Commission.

I have to say that I am disappointed that we are now in November and there is still no sign of the review that the Commission ordered following the ruling of the EU's General Court. The threat of a recovery order has only exacerbated the situation, and I urge the Commission to think carefully about the knock-on effects if it were to ask for a rebate. The Commission must realise that people's jobs are at risk, not only from the threat of a recovery order but from the fact that it has prolonged the outcome of the report. That only adds a greater sense of uncertainty in the quarrying industry.

Having represented the Mid Ulster constituency for the past six months, and for many years before that behind the scenes, I know the effect that the overall economic downturn has had on my constituency. However, few workers have faced the brunt of it to the same extent as those working in the construction and quarrying industries. With the slump in the number of new houses being built locally, the collapse of cross-border employment and the 40% reduction to the capital budget, the local quarries are up against the wall at present. Now, for almost a year after the levy credit scheme was suspended, local quarries have been facing the competitive disadvantages of sharing a land border with a state where no such levy exists. That point, I hope, features prominently in the ongoing review.

Of course, as others have noted, the suspension of the scheme has not only affected our local quarries but impacted on Northern Ireland's already reduced capital spending abilities. Given that the Government accounts for 60% of local construction work, it is inevitable that the public purse is hit. Based on a replication of last year's figures, Roads Service is seeing an average price increase of 2 5% for all resurfacing and reconstruction activities. Bearing in mind this year's already reduced spending, that is 2 5% that the Department for Regional Development could desperately do with.

Northern Ireland's Members of the European Parliament also have a crucial role in making representations to the Commission on the threat of a rebate and the ongoing review. On that, I am glad to say my party's MEP, Jim Nicholson, has met the EU's Commissioner for Competition, Mr Almunia, several times on this issue alone. My party has also invited the commissioner to Northern Ireland to see for himself the effect that the suspension of the levy credit scheme is having on the livelihoods of those employed in the quarrying industry.

Without wanting to pre-empt the outcome of the review, the Ulster Unionist Party is committed to finding an equitable solution to the problem. The construction industry is too important for us to abandon and to let face this battle alone. Can you imagine any other industry that has no choice but to increase the cost of its materials by 49% when, only a few miles away across the border, the same materials are available at a fraction of the price?

It is some comfort to note that the coalition Government remain absolutely committed to reinstating the previous scheme or something equivalent to it in Northern Ireland. The aggregates levy credit scheme was not a perfect solution for Northern Ireland, but it at least provided a level of support and its environmental credentials were widely acclaimed. However, with the EU court's ruling against it, and now the real issue of a recovery order being made, I fear for the future. That is why it is so important that the Assembly, the Executive and everyone else who has a stake in Northern Ireland send the clear and unambiguous message to the European Commission that we support our quarries and will never regret wanting to see them do well. I support the motion.

Ms Ritchie: In supporting the motion, I am conscious that the Quarry Products Association must be commended for the hard work that it has done in difficult circumstances to protect the rights and considerations of all its members. The quarry products industry in Northern Ireland is central and fundamental to our construction industry, which was already, prior to the withdrawal of the rebate, in the grip of one of the worst recessions that we have seen in these islands for many years.

When the rebate scheme was introduced in 2004, our construction industry was in a boom. The scheme was withdrawn in October last year following an approach by the British Aggregates Association to the European Commission about a breach in state aid rules. The European Commission took the easy option by deciding to withdraw the rebate, subject to an investigation. I recall going to see the then Economic Secretary

to the Treasury, Justine Greening, about this issue. The Finance Minister met her independently from me. She said that Treasury fully agreed with us that the rebate needed to be reinstated but that we needed to have the arsenal at our disposal to make a reasonable case.

I understood that, following the UK Budget, provisions had to be made in the Finance Bill to show that there was a strong case for reinstatement. I further understand that all that information was submitted to the Treasury in September this year and that it has taken considerable time for the European Commission to go through it. I wrote to the EU commissioner in July, asking him to expedite enquiries into this matter. At that time, one of his officials said that he would like to emphasise that he was:

> *"aware of the importance of the aggregates levy relief for the quarrying sector in Northern Ireland".*

Being aware of the importance of it, they should go to the ultimate conclusion and ensure that it is reinstated, notwithstanding the fact that the Commission is probably concerned about any breach that may occur.

It is also important that there is no recovery back to 2004, because that would further imperil an already beleaguered quarry products industry. Mr Wells stated it, and I know from my South Down constituency, that there is a considerable reliance on the construction industry and on quarry products and quarrying for employment and the building supplies industry. To pump-prime our economy, it is essential and fundamental that the rebate scheme is reinstated with no recovery order. In fact, the Minister of Finance will recall from last week that he and I raised this issue at the Northern Ireland Grand Committee at Westminster. Although we got support on that occasion from the Minister of State, I did not sense any urgency on the Grand Committee's part.

5.00 pm

Therefore, what I am asking for today, supplementary to what is in the motion, is that the Minister of Finance, along with the all-party construction group, the Chair of the Environment Committee and, of course, the Quarry Products Association go directly to Brussels to make a strong case for the reinstatement of the scheme, with nothing recoverable from 2004. That is what we require to ensure that we have sound quarry and construction industries and sound recovery for the local economy in rural areas in particular, as they have been imperilled as a result of last year's decision, the downturn and the economic recession.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I thank all the Members who took part. I am not so sure that this has been a debate, insofar as no different points of view have been expressed other than Mr Wells querying my environmental credentials, which I am deeply hurt by. However, it has shown that there is widespread concern across the whole of Northern Ireland about the impact of the European decision.

The Executive fully recognise all the difficulties that Members expressed about this important part of the supply chain in the construction industry. Indeed, in the September monitoring round, we provided additional money for schools and roads maintenance and house building. I must say that, when the Executive have responded to the construction industry and the points it has made, the Quarry Products Association is one group that has always been prepared to at least acknowledge that something has been done. Other people, however, feel that they have to find fault with what the Assembly and Executive have done. Indeed, I note the statement that the association put out recognising the positive impact that the decisions in the September monitoring round will have on the industry and, in particular, on its members. I thank it for that statement and for the way in which it has co-operated with us in dealing with this case.

Of course, it was not just a case of saying to the Government at Westminster, "Will you do something about this?". To make the case, information had to be provided and a case had to be made by the Assembly, members of the Quarry Products Association and the industry itself. Of course, one of the reasons why it has taken some time to prepare the case for Europe is that all of that information had to be gathered. Indeed, there was a difficulty at one stage, and I want to thank Gordon Best for his effort in going round his members and getting them to supply information that we were then able to build into the case.

Members made a number of points, which I will try to deal with as quickly as possible. The first point raised — I will not mention individuals because I think that all Members raised the

same kinds of points really — was that the credit scheme has provided real benefits. Indeed, that is what it was designed to do. It has provided real benefits in cleaning up the industry in Northern Ireland. Many Members mentioned the considerable investment that has gone into quarries in order for firms to qualify for the credit scheme and into improving the environment. When the first environmental audit of ALCS members was carried out, it was found that a total of 3,787 environmental improvements were required to meet the criteria for the scheme. By the date of suspension on 1 December 2010, 95 issues had not yet been declared compliant at 20 of the 168 sites. Therefore, it has had a huge impact in reducing illegal quarrying and improving the environmental quality of quarries throughout Northern Ireland, which I know is dear to the Member for South Down's heart.

The second thing that I want to say is on the issue of urgency and support. I have been in contact with Justine Greening on a number of occasions, and my officials are in touch with Treasury officials regularly. One thing that I cannot say is that the Government at Westminster and Treasury officials have been lukewarm or are dragging their feet; they are at one with us. There are times when we have differences with central government at Westminster; there are times when their emphasis is different from ours. It is right that, on those occasions, we criticise them, query them and ask what they are doing. However, in that case, it would be churlish not to accept the support that there has been from Treasury Ministers and officials in preparing the case.

As I said, it was complicated. Evidence had to be gathered. To make a case, we have to show that, first, it is necessary. The terms of necessity for the scheme must show whether it is possible for the increase in production costs to be passed on without a reduction in sales. That means that information has to be gathered from across the industry. That took time. We also have to show that it is compliant with article 110 of the treaty of the European Union, which prevents discriminatory taxation between member states.

Information had to be gathered on those issues. Just last week, Justine Greening confirmed that the case will be submitted to the Commission by the end of November 2011. Therefore, we are at the end of a process whereby the Commission will have to investigate the case as it has been submitted.

Ms Ritchie: Has the Minister any idea how long it will take the European Commission to assimilate, assess and evaluate that information? I am sure that he would agree that local industry is imperilled the longer we have to wait for that information and the Commission's assessment and outcome.

Mr Wilson: I do not have an answer to that question. Members have been helpful in their suggestions in the debate. MEPs have a role to play. The Treasury has a role to play to ensure that, if there are queries about the case, they are answered quickly and we express the urgency of the case. I believe that it will be my job to impress it upon the Treasury that, if there is still work to be done or queries to be answered, we keep the pressure on. We will not make a separate case of our own; that will go from the Treasury. When it goes from the Treasury, I will write to the president to ensure that some urgency is attached to it. Those are things that we can do.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The recovery issue was raised in the debate. I do not think that we can be complacent on any of those matters. However, there is one thing that I do not want to happen: alarm when there is no need for it. That can have implications for the industry. If a quarry owner finds that there are opportunities, as some are doing now, asks whether he should invest and there is all that talk about the recovery of all that money, that could affect his investment decision. Therefore, I want to put the whole issue of recovery in context. First of all, the scheme itself would have to be deemed unlawful. Two conditions would have to be met for recovery to even be contemplated. The first condition relates to whether the scheme was ever notified to the European Commission and the second to whether it was in violation of state rules. There appears to be no case in which the European courts have decided that recovery must be ordered where there was proper notification and the scheme was implemented properly.

As far as the aggregates levy credit scheme is concerned, it was notified to the Commission on 5 January 2004, and it was not put into effect until the Commission had made its final decision on 7 May 2004. So, as far as the notification and the implementation were

concerned, the UK Government abided by the rules. That in itself reduces the possibility of any recovery order being made. Indeed, as I said, there are at present no cases in which, when those conditions have been met, the European court has ordered recovery.

Secondly, even if it was found to be incompatible with the internal market, that does not mean that the aid is also unlawful. Even if it was unlawful, the regulations state that recovery may be sought. If we add all those things together — the fact that there was proper notification, that there was proper implementation and that it was not implemented until the Commission had made a decision — the fact that the court has now ruled against it does not necessarily mean that we are in a position where recovery can even be justified. Even if it was found to be unlawful, there is still discretion about whether recovery is sought.

Mr Wells: I think that the reason why this debate is being held and there are so many Members here is that we all received a briefing from the QPA, which is normally a very reliable source of information, saying that it believes that there is a possibility — nothing more than that — that that could happen. It is coming from the official voice of the industry that that is a dark cloud on the horizon. Can the Minister understand why some of us are quite alarmed to read that? Does he believe that that is maybe overstating the case?

Mr Wilson: Recovery has been mentioned, but those are the conditions needed for recovery, and I think that you have to put all those qualifications around it. Even if that was the case, all the arguments that Members have given here today — the fact that there have been environmental improvements; that, as a result of the credit, money was invested in the industry to effect those environmental improvements; and that the money is not even there to be recovered anyway, as the Member from South Down and others have said — are the kinds of points that would be made, apart from all the other legal points, by the Government in fighting any case.

I have sought to find out whether, if a recovery order was made, the UK Government would be prepared to take a court case and litigation. They have quite rightly pointed out that, at this stage — until it actually happens, until you see the terms of it etc — it will be a Cabinet Office decision, and no decision has been made on it. It could be fought by either the UK Government or by the Assembly here.

I want to try to put it in context. I see it in the kind of context that I have described here today. It is a very remote possibility. Of course, it is right that the Quarry Products Association and others have raised the issue. We are aware of it as well, and we have raised it on a number of occasions with Treasury Ministers, but it is important that the issue is placed in that kind of context.

5.15 pm

In conclusion, I believe that there is a case for a new scheme. Members have talked about the differential that exists between here and the Irish Republic. I believe that there is a case for a new scheme because of the improvements afforded to us through having a quarry industry in Northern Ireland that does not do unnecessary damage to the environment. Therefore, a robust case can be mounted in support of a new scheme. I also believe that there is evidence that as a result of the increased costs there has been an impact on the output and sales of the industry. That is the kind of thing that the European Commission will look at.

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is almost up.

Mr Wilson: We will continue to work with the Government at Westminster, and we will continue to press the European Commission, once the information goes to it at the end of the month. Members should rest assured that this is not something to which we will give only light attention.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. You have eased into the seat previously occupied by the Príomh-Leas Cheann Comhairle, and I thank you for joining us. On behalf of the Members who jointly tabled the motion — effectively, the members of the all-party group on the construction industry — I thank all those who contributed to the debate. Seldom is the House so united than has been witnessed this afternoon. Members obviously appreciate the importance of the quarry industry to the overall economy. It was good to hear that Jim Wells and Sammy Wilson could agree on an environmental issue. That was a welcome development. On occasions, the Minister referred to the Member for South Down, but

there are four Members for South Down here, so he should be more specific and refer to the Member for South Down by name.

I have been speaking to quarry operators in recent days, one of whom told me that his practical daily experience is, effectively, that of acting as a tax collector. There are people who are not willing to pay or who do not pay, and he does not want his working life to be that of a tax collector. One thing that we could do, as an Assembly, is to advise the Executive to accelerate progress towards the commencement and completion of the A5, A6 and A8 schemes. It is my understanding that those projects are worth over £1 billion collectively and would make a very valuable contribution to the economy and to the quarrying and construction industries at this time.

Paul Frew proposed the motion. He retraced the history of the suspension of the credit scheme in 2010, and he stated that the quarrying industry faces a very uncertain future. He reminded us that this was not money for nothing, because it led to major environmental improvements in many quarries, and that money saved was reinvested in the industry. Like many Members, he made the point that the recovery order would effectively put family-owned concerns out of business.

Danny Kinahan spoke next and urged us to pull together on the issue. He said that any such clawback of £250 million-plus would kill the quarrying industry and that the levy was aimed at helping the environment. Many Members, including Mr Kinahan, referred to the "no levy" situation in the Twenty-six Counties, as I shall describe it, and the disadvantage that is suffered by people in the North. He talked about fairness in the matter and about widening out the lobby to include MPs and MEPs and using mechanisms such as the North/South Ministerial Council to make progress on the issue, and he emphasised the urgency.

Patsy McGlone reminded us of the rising unemployment in the construction industry, including in his constituency. He provided a valuable reminder that the partial exemption of 80% was not available to all because it required entering into major environmental commitments. He talked about those claiming jobseeker's allowance and how that is not good for people or the Exchequer. He also referred to the more favourable circumstances for quarry operators in the South.

It was particularly welcome that Anna Lo, in her capacity as Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, supported Members in tabling the motion. Anna referred to the significant improvement in environmental performance. She and Mr Wells were involved in a discussion about whether recovery would be detrimental or devastating, and I think that they agreed that it would be both.

Then, Mr Wells made his submission and reminded us of a series of challenges that the quarrying industry faces, including the levy, the rising cost of product and some quarry operators' proximity to the border. He said that closure would be at the end of the line should there be an attempt to recoup the £250 million. Sometimes, that figure grows to £300 million. He claimed that he is one of a few Members who have an interest in the environment, so I give credit to Mr Wells.

Joe Byrne said that he had participated in a similar debate as far back as 12 years ago. I was very emotional, Joe, as you were naming the many rural places that I also like. It was wonderful to hear all those places being named — I will go home some day. Joe also talked about the crucifying diesel costs that we hear about regularly. Indeed, this morning, on the forecourt of Connolly's filling station in Pomeroy, people came up to me and talked about those. Mr Byrne said that the border area was at a disadvantage — perhaps that was a call for all-Ireland harmonisation — and mentioned that jobs will go.

A good number of Members paid tribute to the Quarry Products Association, led by Mr Best, for the manner in which it lobbies. Sometimes, I think that it would be charitable of us to give Mr Best an office in the Building. The Assembly Commission should maybe talk about providing an office for the Quarry Products Association because he is here regularly.

Mr Wilson: More often than Members. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McElduff: I think that everybody agrees that he is a good attendee and is very proactive.

William Irwin used the phrase "severe ramifications" when describing the consequences for the quarrying and

construction industries. He talked about the need to act quickly and be decisive.

Sandra Overend reminded us about the jobs at risk. She said that there was no levy in the South and emphasised the crucial partnership role of MEPs in helping us, citing the example of her party colleague Jim Nicholson, who has done considerable work on the issue.

Margaret Ritchie, the Member for South Down, commended the Quarry Products Association and reminded us that the industry is in the grip of one of the worst recessions of modern times. As an MP and MLA, she has engaged the European Commissioner, and she wants the commissioners and their officials to expand on being aware of the importance of the issue. She said that the South Down constituency was heavily reliant on the construction industry. Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to head for Brussels on this one, and she wanted there to be no recovery and the reinstatement of the scheme.

The Minister said that "debate" was perhaps a misnomer because we are all singing from one hymn sheet, with no divergence of opinion. He reminded us that the Executive are a listening Executive, and, in monitoring rounds, they like to hear and respond appropriately to reasonable and well-made cases from the quarrying and construction industries. Similarly, he paid tribute to the QPA, which provides substantive information to help make that case. He suggested that, judging by his dealings with the British Treasury, we are pushing at an open door. In an interesting way, he perhaps suggested that there is less need for alarm than some Members think. He feels reassured by the statement that a recovery order would be made only if this were unlawful, and he said that that was notified properly to the Commission in January 2004. Although he supported the motion, he wondered whether the alarm was warranted.

I will leave it at that, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank all Members who participated in the debate, and I thank the Minister of Finance and Personnel for being in attendance.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly recognises the imminent danger to the quarrying industry if the EU Commission decides to require a recovery of the aggregates levy rebate from 2004; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make urgent representations to the EU president and the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting that no recovery order is made.*

Adjourned at 5.26 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 8 November 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Private Members' Business

Petition of Concern: Pat Finucane Case

Motion proposed [7 November]:

> *That this Assembly notes the British Government's acceptance that there was collusion by the army, the RUC and the Security Service in the murder of Pat Finucane; recognises that accepting collusion is not sufficient in itself and that the public now need to know the extent and nature of that collusion; and calls on the British Government to honour the binding commitment, made by the then British and Irish Governments in the Weston Park agreement, by establishing a judicial inquiry, as recommended by Judge Cory in 2004, with the power to compel witnesses to give evidence under oath. — [Mr A Maginness.]*

Amendment proposed [7 November]:

At end insert

> *"; and further calls on the British Government to establish this judicial inquiry within the next three months." — [Mr G Kelly.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members that a valid petition of concern was presented yesterday in relation to the motion on the murder of Pat Finucane and the amendment to that motion. Under Standing Order 28, the votes could not take place until at least one day had passed. The votes will, therefore, be the first item of business today. I also remind Members that the votes on the motion and the amendment will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 37; Noes 55.

AYES

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr P Maskey and Mr McCartney.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Givan and Mr Ross.

Total votes	92	Total Ayes	37	[40.2%]
Nationalist Votes	36	Nationalist Ayes	36	[100%]
Unionist Votes	47	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	1	[11.1%]

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 45; Noes 46.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

OTHER:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Durkan and Mr McDevitt.

NOES

UNIONIST:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Givan and Mr Ross.

Total votes	91	Total Ayes	45	[49.5%]
Nationalist Votes	36	Nationalist Ayes	36	[100%]
Unionist Votes	46	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	9	[100%]

Main Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

11.00 am

Ministerial Statement

Dementia Services

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am grateful for this opportunity to make a statement to the Assembly on the important matter of dementia services in Northern Ireland. Across the developed world, the increasing number of older people brings with it an increasing number of people with dementia.

We are all agreed on the significance of the challenge posed by our progressively ageing population. Dementia is of increasing importance to government, to our communities, to our families and to the individuals who have dementia. It is a major concern for us all, and the scale of the problem is increasing in accordance with our ageing population.

Northern Ireland has the fastest growing elderly population in the UK. Over 250,000 men and women are of a pensionable age, which is nearly one in six of our population. By 2028, that ratio will have increased to nearly one in five and by 2050, to nearly one in four. Demographic changes have a specific impact on the demand for health and social care services. As life expectancy rises, the number of people affected by conditions associated with old age will increase dramatically. On the basis of rates from across Europe, dementia numbers may rise from their current level of 19,000 to around 60,000 by 2051.

We must also remember that dementia does not affect only the elderly. A significant number of people under 65 are classified as having early-onset dementia. That is especially difficult to diagnose, so the actual number is uncertain. However, estimates are that as many as 1,000 people could be affected by early-onset dementia in Northern Ireland, and considering the specific needs of that group is another challenge that must be faced.

I am aware that we, in this Province, provide a range of excellent services for people with dementia. Those services are provided at a local level and involve those who live with dementia, their carers and families, and teams of professionals who provide assessment and ongoing support

and services that are tailored to meet the challenging needs of people with dementia.

The multidisciplinary nature of that care is a tribute to our integrated health and social care system. Doctors, nurses, social workers, voluntary sector staff, members of housing associations and the independent sector all combine to provide pathways of care. In the midst of that process, we have genuine partnerships with family members and carers, who together enable individually tailored programmes of care to be developed.

Better outcomes for people living with dementia can be achieved when we come to understand how to delay the onset of dementia, when we have better ways to diagnose it early and when we have effective treatments for dementia alongside high quality care. Our goal must be to ensure that people with dementia are given every chance to live their lives to the fullest capacity and as independently as possible.

As far as possible, people should be supported to remain in their own homes. However, almost half of those with dementia in Northern Ireland are in care homes, with another sizeable proportion in acute hospitals on any given day, often staying longer than other patients. We need to ensure that those in care homes or in hospital are there because they need to be there and that they receive appropriate care while in those settings.

All that leads me to why I am making this statement today: I am very pleased to announce the publication of the document entitled 'Improving Dementia Services in Northern Ireland: A Regional Strategy'. The dementia strategy has been developed at a time of increasing pressure to address the dementia issues arising from the demographic change that I detailed earlier. Underpinning the development of the strategy has been service user and carer involvement.

The Alzheimer's Society carried out a pre-consultation exercise, entitled the 'Listening Well' report, with service users and carers to help to inform the strategy at an early stage. We consulted on the draft strategy last year, and accompanying the public consultation was a targeted consultation with service users and carers that was carried out by the Dementia Services Development Centre. Steps have since been taken to reflect the views expressed during consultation, and those are reflected in the final strategy document that I present to you today. Also underpinning the strategy has been the development of values and principles that are considered key to guiding the development of services for people with dementia and for those who care for them. They are: dignity and respect; autonomy; justice and equality; safe, effective, person-centred care; care for carers; and skills for staff. As you can see, there has been a focus through the development process on creating a strategy that is centred on the person and aimed at addressing the things that concern people the most.

For those with a diagnosis of dementia, the strategy requires us to look critically at how we deliver services. We must all ensure that it is not only what people with dementia and their carers say that they want and need, but that it is supported by the evidence of effectiveness. I want to ensure that people with dementia are treated with awareness and respect, especially by those providing services, and that they are supported to maintain their independence for as long as possible. Importantly, more needs to be done to promote the key message that a healthy lifestyle can delay or prevent the onset of dementia and, indeed, many other long-term conditions. An unhealthy lifestyle will increase people's risks of developing such conditions.

The key themes of the strategy are as follows. With regard to prevention, there is some scope to prevent or delay the onset of dementia through a healthy lifestyle and by reducing cardiovascular risk factors. We must raise awareness and address the stigma associated with the condition. We must provide access to early diagnosis, enhancing existing memory services to agreed commissioning standards to provide assessment, diagnosis, information and support. A staged approach to care and support as the condition progresses is important, with the aim of maintaining daily living and independence as far as possible. We must improve staff awareness and skills to respond appropriately to people's needs. We must redesign services to shift care, as far as possible, to people's own homes and to avoid admission to hospital or care home where possible. The need for worldwide research into causes, cure and care for dementia, and the part played by Northern Ireland researchers, are also acknowledged.

I believe that the strategy can help to shape the development of excellent services for people with dementia. The new mental capacity legislation, which I hope to introduce to the Assembly next autumn, is also likely to have

an impact on people with dementia, offering additional support and safeguards when they are unable to make their own decisions.

Meeting the increasing demand for dementia support services will require everyone — from health and social care (HSC) professionals and voluntary and community organisations to service users and carers — to work together to develop more efficient and effective systems of care and to plan and implement better treatment and support programmes.

I am confident that we have produced a practical, realistic and achievable strategy for people with dementia that is designed to deliver the best services and support arrangements that we can provide and which may be tailored to suit an individual's needs and circumstances. We must always remember that simple interventions can often have important and significant outcomes.

Most important, however, is that we are not starting from scratch. Our health and social care system, working in partnership with community and voluntary organisations and the independent sector, represents a skilled, knowledgeable and dedicated base on which to build.

The strategy sets the direction of travel for improving dementia services. I expect the HSC Board, the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the trusts to reflect that in their commissioning decisions so that services can be refocused to address the improvements required.

There would be a very strong case for additional funding for dementia services, given the growing needs that I have explained and the pressures on families and service providers. In an ideal world, I would allocate £6 million to £8 million to increase aspects of provision in the next three years. However, I am also asking all concerned to make better use of existing resources devoted to acute sector provision and to care homes. There is evidence that there is room for greater efficiency in both areas — it is simply not possible to add new money in the present budgetary position facing the Executive.

In closing, I take this opportunity to thank the many individuals and organisations that contributed to the development of this document. They deserve great credit for their efforts in producing the strategy, which I commend to the House.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I very much welcome this statement and the publication of the dementia strategy, which we have looked forward to for some time. We appreciate the Minister's bringing it to the Assembly today.

The Health Committee recently had an insightful meeting with the Alzheimer's Society, dementia services and Professor Peter Passmore, and I know that there are many good things in the strategy. There is quite a lot that we can do to improve the pathway and outcomes for people with dementia. I encourage the Minister to do what he can to find resources, because training is a big issue, and those who are trained to deal with people with dementia can deal with anything. I believe that all our health professionals need to be trained up.

Training is an issue on which I have been working with the Western Health and Social Care Trust, and I know that its work on that area is out in front of that of the other trusts. Does the Minister recognise the importance that training can have, not just in diagnosing dementia and ensuring that early intervention is in place but in dealing with dementia when patients get particularly confused and need additional help?

Mr Poots: Absolutely, and the further skilling up of our staff who work with people with dementia is one element that has been identified in the strategy. We already have excellent people out there, but let us ensure that they can develop and maximise their skills.

In my statement, I said that by 2051, 60,000 people will be suffering from dementia. If we look round the House, the younger Members are more likely to be in that range. Let us be honest: investing in this service is an investment in our future, because we either die young or grow old, and if we grow old, there is a fair chance that we will end up getting dementia. We should be very clear that this is something that we are doing for people now, but many of us will probably end up benefitting from it sometime in the future.

Mr Wells: I think that the entire House will welcome the publication of this strategy. Indeed, Committee members have been impressed by the quality of previous strategies developed by the Department, all of which have taken forward considerably the treatment and care of those with various conditions. Therefore, we welcome that this strategy is coming from a stable that has produced many thoroughbreds.

I listened to the statement to hear whether there was any mention of increased resources being made available for the treatment of those with dementia. The Minister is absolutely right to say that there will be a dramatic increase in the number of sufferers. However, does the strategy outline where the funding will come from to meet that increasing demand?

Mr Poots: Ideally, we would like to spend £6 million to £8 million more over the next three years. However, at this stage, we do not have that funding to add to the service. We can seek to develop greater efficiencies in the system. For example, there is the potential for fewer people to end up in some kind of care and to remain in their own homes, where they will receive proper support. That is where people want to be. I know that the vast majority of older people want to be in their own homes. They do not want to be isolated, by the way. They want ensure that they will have engagement with people. We need to ensure that we can facilitate that as far as possible, and there are savings to be made on that, so we do what people want and save money at the same time. If we can achieve that, it will allow us more money to spend on developing the service.

It is critical that we develop the service, go ahead with the strategy — as opposed to waiting for manna from heaven or money from the Treasury to arrive in Northern Ireland — and seek to make things better for people who are experiencing early-onset dementia.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Mark Durkan to speak. Sorry, my apologies, Mr John McCallister. I must not take people out of turn.

11.15 am

Mr McCallister: I am not sure whether I should be flattered that the Minister included me in his age bracket when he said some of "the younger Members". I noticed that he did not include his colleague Mr Wells in that. *[Laughter.]* It is long past Jim's retirement time.

Like other Members, we warmly welcome the publication of the strategy. The Minister quite rightly identified that people want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Is he confident that the strategy, coupled with the best use of resources, can achieve the result of helping people to stay in their homes and giving their families and carers the maximum support that they deserve?

Mr Poots: I think that Mr McCallister is right: although some of us will be octogenarians in 40 years' time, Mr Wells will be a real old crock by then. *[Laughter.]*

Getting back to the serious point, on the issue of the strategy, I am confident about the need for a system that is fit for purpose. We need to look at the issue in the round and in its entirety. We are looking at things such as connected health — I hope to make an announcement about that very soon — and the role that the primary sector plays vis-à-vis hospitals. We are looking at a situation where 40% of people with dementia and other conditions might end up in hospital care. If such conditions are managed better in the first instance, we can keep people out of hospital, thereby saving money that can then be invested in the primary sector. I am keen to shift the focus of care away from cure to prevention, where possible, early intervention and better management of existing conditions.

Any wise person who owns machinery, for example, will ensure that that machinery is well-serviced so that it does not need much repair when real damage is done. Why would you not do the same with the human body? It is a case of looking after the human body as opposed to trying to fix it after the damage is done. We can certainly do considerable work in the primary care sector to ensure that that damage is not done to individuals in the first instance. We need to change the focus completely from hospital care to the primary care sector and to prevention and early intervention in the first instance.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I join other Members in welcoming the Minister's statement today and the publication of the report, which we have been waiting on for some time. I do not disagree with anything in the report. The Minister states that he is confident that the strategy is practical, realistic and achievable, and yet in the next paragraph or two, he states that there is no additional money to put into it. That will be a real cause for concern for service providers and the families of dementia sufferers. I recognise that efficiencies are to be made elsewhere so that resources can be redirected towards the strategy. However, does the Minister envisage any resource bids being made in further budgetary monitoring rounds to implement the strategy?

Mr Poots: Solutions to problems do not always lie in throwing more money at them. Very often,

it can be about reconfiguring how things are done. I know that the Scottish Parliament is ahead of us in delivering a dementia strategy. I understand that it did not put more money into that but that it is already seeing benefits from it. Without doubt, if we had more money, we would lend it to the strategy, and we would support the strategy with more finances. We can look at monitoring rounds. However, unless there is ongoing finance, there is no point in starting something that we cannot continue. A monitoring round could assist us in providing for something that is a one-off. However, if something needs ongoing resources, it would be better not to start that than to have to stop it a few months down the line. We are prepared to look at monitoring rounds, but bear in mind what I have just indicated, namely the problems that might arise.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his statement, which we all welcome very much. I refer the Minister to the six values and principles that he mentioned. Although they are all very important in their own right, I want to draw his attention to care for carers. Will he indicate whether the needs of carers, including psychological support, respite support, which is very important, and crisis support will be comprehensively addressed in the strategy? Will people with a learning disability and dementia also be supported? We look forward to the quick implementation of the strategy, which, when it is delivered, will prove that the Assembly has worked for the people whom it represents.

Mr Poots: There is a carers' strategy called Caring for Carers. That is very important. Carers are wonderful people who do an awful lot of work that the state could never fulfil for individuals who need help. The Caring for Carers strategy is an ongoing piece of work. It recognises, values and supports the role of carers.

The Department has also developed the carers' support and needs assessment component of the Northern Ireland single assessment tool. It will promote a common approach across the trusts for the assessment of carers' needs. A joint Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and Department for Social Development (DSD) review of the support provision for carers was also carried out. Its findings were published in November 2009. Therefore, we will continue to develop and to provide support, including practical, educational and, where appropriate, psychological support, to those who care for people with dementia in line with the needs that are identified from those assessments and with recommendations that arise from the joint review.

As regards respite for carers, additional funding was allocated in the previous comprehensive spending review (CSR) period that resulted in an additional 1,200 weeks of dementia respite care. The strategy asks the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency to ensure that a range of traditional and innovative short-break provision is developed to meet the needs of people with dementia and their carers. In addition, the Health and Social Care Board has completed a report on the identification and quantification of respite provision, identifying gaps and inconsistencies in practice among trusts, and will set up a group involving all trusts to produce and implement an action plan based on its report. The objective is to have more equitable access, uniform professional assessment processes and a more consistent approach.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement on dementia services. What is the future for the Dementia Services Development Centre's Northern Ireland office?

Mr Poots: My Department has been contributing to the cost of the three-year pilot of the Dementia Services Development Centre's Northern Ireland office. It is now in its third year. Therefore, we, along with other funders, have to consider our options for the future. Our considerations will be informed by an evaluation process that is nearing completion. At this stage, I cannot say exactly what we will do. We are going through a process that will lead to our making a decision in the not-too-distant future. I thank the Member for his question.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, want to thank the Minister for his statement. In it, he mentioned that diagnosis of early-onset dementia is especially difficult. I ask him to make resources available, as far as possible, so that people with early-onset dementia can be diagnosed more quickly. A friend of mine died at 48 years of age from early-onset dementia. It took over two years to diagnose his condition because it was felt that he was too young to have dementia. He missed out on treatment that could actually have prolonged his life. Quicker diagnosis would also ensure that people with early-onset dementia

could make arrangements for power of attorney. They could organise their affairs while they are still compos mentis, and matters would be sorted out for them when their condition progresses.

In conclusion, I want to welcome the appointment of Claire Keatinge as Commissioner for Older People —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must ask his question.

Mr Brady: She takes up her post on Monday 14 November 2011.

Mr Poots: GPs are identified in the strategy as one of the key groups that need to improve their knowledge and skills around dementia in order to aid early diagnosis. The Dementia Services Development Centre's Northern Ireland office has developed and distributed an information pack for GPs in Northern Ireland to aid with that. The strategy also asks the HSC Board, in collaboration with the Public Health Agency and HSC trusts, to draw up criteria and clear protocols for referral from GPs to the memory service.

Ms P Bradley: I welcome the statement and the strategy, as it will go a long way in assisting multidisciplinary teams that work with people with dementia, as well as service users and their carers. You said in your statement that better outcomes can be achieved for people living with dementia. What are the specific plans for people who develop dementia at a very early age?

Mr Poots: Dementia is a particularly difficult diagnosis for younger people to receive, as, very often, they will be in employment, they will have a family to support and will have financial commitments, and, to be honest, many of the services available for older people with dementia are inappropriate for younger people with early-onset dementia. Therefore, in view of their particular needs, the strategy asks the HSC trusts to work together to develop a regional care pathway for younger people with dementia. Where it is appropriate to do so, it should link with a regional tertiary service, where referral for assessment of more complex conditions and a second opinion can be obtained.

Mrs D Kelly: I also welcome the statement. Can the Minister tell me whether the strategy will have an action plan with measurable outcomes and a timetable for implementation, and will a review be built in?

Mr Poots: It is proposed that a jointly led HSC Board and PHA regional group will oversee the work, with representation from statutory and non-statutory providers, people with dementia and their carers and organisations representing them. That group will report to my Department on progress against actions on a six-monthly basis.

Ms Lewis: I thank the Minister for his statement on dementia services in Northern Ireland. Can anything be done to prevent dementia, and does the strategy deal with that?

Mr Poots: It has been identified that we need to look after ourselves and live lifestyles that are good for us. However, that is not to say that no one who lives a healthy lifestyle will have dementia; many people will. Pharmaceutical companies are doing some interesting work, and we could be looking at drug intervention at some point, which may greatly assist in that.

There are other physical methods of delaying dementia, and there are courses of work being done in that area, although their effectiveness will have to be proven in due course. However, there is merit in continuing to research things such as stimulating the brain and generating the neurons in the brain to activate them, where that has not been the case for some time, and engaging people in things that they have never done previously. One thing is absolutely certain: dementia is on the increase. It is a condition that we need to seek to manage to the best of our ability. Therefore, I will support those who engage in such research. I want to work with other countries that are engaged in such research, and if people want to carry out trials in Northern Ireland, which may help us to be world leaders in dealing with the issue, I will work with them to ensure that that is the case.

There is a considerable amount of work to be done to see how we can offset and delay dementia. If we could delay dementia by five years, it would make a vast difference to the well-being of individuals and the quality of life that they would enjoy. It would also produce a huge saving for my Department and the Executive as a consequence.

11.30 am

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the publication of the strategy. Does the Minister agree that there are those with dementia who have greater complex needs

and that they need to be placed in special units of certain nursing homes? There is a shortage of beds right across the Province in some of those homes. Does the Minister agree that it should be mandatory for those working in those sectors to be fully skilled up? How will he address the bed shortage?

Mr Poots: One of the things identified by the report is the skilling-up of staff, so that is certainly an area that we will look at. I am not sure that we have a problem with bed shortages. In some instances, it may be a problem with getting the packages put together to actually use those beds. I hear people in the private sector saying that they have beds available and that the trusts are not taking them up. That is why we indicated in the strategy that the HSC and the trusts should look at formulae to ensure that the needs of people who require beds are met. At the same time, the needs of people who wish to stay in their own home and can be supported in their own home should also be met. Sometimes people end up in care homes too easily, and we need to work hard to ensure that people stay in the home that they want to stay in — their own home — but give them the support that they need to do that.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for today's announcement about the publication of the strategy. In September, you were outlining the correct approach for dementia sufferers and their families at the opening of the Bardan Cottage senior activities and social care centre in Newcastle. Now, today, you are telling us that your Department will look to shoehorn dementia services into the current health estate, much of which is not fit for purpose, which I find totally unacceptable. How do you intend to precipitate your lobby for additional services, and how do you intend to deal with dementia services in the absence of a Programme for Government?

Mr Poots: The care that is offered in the Bardan home and other facilities across Northern Ireland is a good exemplar of where we need to go; that is to ensure that people can, as far as possible, stay in their own home. I mentioned earlier that people do not want to stay in their own home in isolation. That is where places like Bardan and others can step up to the mark to ensure that people can enjoy a quality of life and do not sit day after day in their own home with little contact with the outside world. As we move towards a healthcare sector that is more strongly based on primary care, early intervention and prevention, facilities that enable older people to get out of their own home for some respite care and so forth are key to the overall strategy, which is to keep people from being in care homes and in the hospital sector.

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

Private Members' Business

Planning Enforcement

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

Mr Wells: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly calls on the Minister of the Environment to carry out a review of planning enforcement.*

As the honourable Member for South Down Mr McCallister keeps reminding me, I have been in politics for a very long time. Indeed, last May, I was 30 years in either local government or this Chamber. I have to say that the most frustrating aspect of my work as an MLA and a councillor and the one in which there has been absolutely no improvement over those 30 years, has been planning enforcement in Northern Ireland. The frustration that I feel led to my decision to table the motion. The motion is widely drawn, so it enables Members who think that, perhaps, enforcement is going too far to have their say, but it also gives a voice to the vast majority of Members, as seen in the questions that have been asked of various Environment Ministers, who believe that enforcement in Northern Ireland at present is, frankly, a farce. I hope to outline why I think it is a farce and where urgent work is required.

First, I want to let the Assembly into the world's worst-kept secret, which is that there is nobody enforcing anything in the Planning Service in Northern Ireland at the moment. By that I mean that the policemen are all in the station. There are no planning officers looking daily for infringements of planning regulations — none whatsoever. Enforcement action is taken only when members of the public or their representatives such as me write to the planning officer to say that such and such has occurred but no planning permission has been obtained. Indeed, planning officers have said to me privately that when they drive up and down the road on other business they frequently see examples of things built without planning permission and where conditions have not been adhered to. They deliberately turn a blind eye because they know that, if they report such incidences, they are adding tremendously to the burden that is already placed on the divisional planning office. Unless an infringement is reported by a member of the public, it will go unenforced.

Secondly, even if an infringement is reported to the planning office, the person who is guilty of the misdemeanour is politely asked to apply for permission for something that he or she should not have done in the first place. If I fail to pay my tax and the taxman finds out, I do not expect him to politely ask me to apply for permission to evade my tax, but that is what happens in the Planning Service. You are immediately invited to submit a planning application. What is really worrying is that 83% of retrospective planning applications in Northern Ireland are approved. That is considerably higher than the number of approvals for people who do things honestly and wait for planning approval before they start building. I know why that is happening, and the planners are frequently passing things that are built already. They would never dream of giving permission if those buildings were not there, but their attitude in private is, "Jim, what on earth do you expect us to do? It is there already, we cannot pull it down". That is the reality; they meekly bow to pressure, give in and give permission for something that should never have been approved in the first place. There is something seriously wrong in Northern Ireland if we have a higher permission rate for retrospective applications than for buildings that have not yet been built.

Mr McCarthy: The Member mentioned buildings being pulled down. Does he know how many buildings, if any, have been pulled down in the recent past?

Mr Wells: That is an excellent question. I have asked it of successive Environment Ministers. The first time I asked it, Sam Foster was the Minister, and that is going back a long time. He did not know of any buildings being pulled down. I then asked the then Minister, Arlene Foster, and, eventually, after a large amount of work, the Department came up with a figure of 13 demolitions in 38 years. I was only aware of two. We are talking about everything from fences to factories, but only 13 have been

pulled down. That is an indication of just how weak planning enforcement is.

How does the situation arise that so few are demolished? What then happens? If the Planning Service has not meekly tugged their forelock and given permission, as it does in eight out of 10 cases, and if you are lucky, things will proceed to planning enforcement action. Then, it goes off into the bushes. Eventually, if you are unlucky, which is often the case, you get a letter from the Planning Service that says, "Dear Mr Wells, this was an unauthorised development, but we are now past four years. It was unauthorised, but it is unenforceable, so we can't take action against it". I have received a number of letters from the Craigavon and Downpatrick office saying, "Sorry, Mr Wells, but we have allowed it to drift past four years, and we cannot serve an enforcement notice now because the time is spent. Therefore, whatever it is and no matter how ugly it is or how many people complain about it, it has de facto planning permission".

My greatest gripe — you are talking to Mr Angry of south Down — is that, under data protection legislation, the poor representative or complainant knows absolutely nothing about what is going on. We are not allowed to know what is going on. We get a letter that states that that would prejudice any enforcement action that is being taken. The problem is that it does not prejudice any enforcement action: no enforcement action is taking place. It is simply sitting in a file somewhere, gathering dust. Eventually, the four years are up, and you get the letter that says, "Sorry, but you are too late". The fundamental weaknesses in planning legislation in Northern Ireland, about which I will say more later, are the four-year rule and the 10-year rule. It defeats me what on earth those are doing on the statute book, but that is what we are stuck with.

We have got down to about 5% of the unauthorised planning applications. Let us say that we get lucky, which is very unusual, and the Planning Service is eventually forced to take enforcement action. Very few get to court. Fewer than 10% ever get to the stage of enforcement notices. I am indebted to the honourable Member for Lagan Valley Mr Craig, who has been particularly diligent and has asked searching questions on the issue. On 8 March 2010, he asked the then Minister of the Environment to list significant successes or outcomes from court. Let us hear those significant successes. In March 2010, a County Tyrone man — he is not named — was fined £1,200 plus costs of £13 and £75 legal costs for operating a sand and gravel pit. I suggest that what came out of that sand and gravel pit in one hour would easily pay the horrendous fine that was imposed by the courts as a result of the diligence of the Planning Service. It gets better. In February 2010, a Carryduff man — I am glad that none of these folk lives in south Down — pleaded guilty and was fined £1,000 plus £75 for costs and £13 legal costs — courts are very cheap when it comes to the Planning Service — at Newtownards Magistrates' Court for failing to comply with an enforcement notice regarding unauthorised outbuildings and associated materials. Finally, in November 2009, a County Down man was fined £500, £250 costs and £20 court costs for a breach of a Planning Service tree preservation order.

I was involved in a controversial case in Newcastle in which a developer moved in at 6.00 am on a Sunday and knocked down a listed building, which opened a site. At that stage, it was conservatively worth at least £300,000. That case has not yet reached court. If that gentleman is fined the sort of sums that are being quoted as successes for the Planning Service, that is no deterrent. Fining someone £2,000 — plus £13 costs if you are in Newtownards — for a site that is worth at least £300,000 — indeed, at the peak of the market it was worth well over £500,000 — is farcical. That is no deterrent to a rogue; it is a rogues' charter.

Our fundamental problem in Northern Ireland is the four-year rule and the 10-year rule. No principle has been established that you cannot benefit from breaching the Planning Order. The easy way to stop such rogue activity would be to say, "Mr Smith and Mr Jones, if you apply for planning permission, we will regard it as if that listed building was still there. You will not benefit from the breach of the planning legislation". We need to do away with the four-year rule and the 10-year rule, and, in certain circumstances, we need to make it an offence to carry out development without planning permission. Our problem is that nothing whatsoever is illegal in Northern Ireland if you do it without planning permission. I could build a six-storey block of flats behind Stormont, and there is nothing that anybody could do about it, unless they served me with an enforcement notice and I failed to comply with it. The argument is made

by the planners, "What about Mrs Smith, who inadvertently built a small conservatory on the end of her house and she did not know that she needed planning permission?". I accept that point. However, when the Planning Service serves a letter saying that development is to stop immediately, it should become an offence at that point and should be something that the courts can enforce. Unfortunately, at the moment, if you can get away with it for four years, they cannot touch you. We need to start taking matters seriously. Equally, we need to appoint more enforcement officers. The last time that we checked, there were only 50 enforcement officers in Northern Ireland and new cases were coming in at the rate of 4,000 a year. Those officers are absolutely swamped, and they cannot go out looking for more work because they cannot cope with the work that they already have.

11.45 am

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Wells: That is why they do not have time to get to the courts and take the matter seriously.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá. I welcome the motion, and, after hearing what Mr Wells had to say, I am prepared to support it, but I want to find out exactly what would be incorporated in the review.

The Member outlined a few cases, and I agree that it was a disgrace that the listed building that he mentioned was taken down. We are caught between representing people who have created a business and the issue of the four-year rule and 10-year rule, which is of key importance to the debate. Mr Wells asked a question of the previous Minister, perhaps with a view to abolishing those rules. I have some concerns about the reasoning behind that. A review of those rules is up for discussion, but I am somewhat concerned that a lot of small rural businesses fall under the 10-year rule, and some are under enforcement. Would it be considered that, at some point, a line could be drawn in the sand with those businesses? We are living with a legacy. Mr Wells said that he has been here for 30 years, and I know that he was not here in 1974 when the four-year rule originated. We have to look seriously at established businesses and whether or not —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: Yes, OK.

Mr Wells: I am very aware of that situation, and it is not the sort of situation that I want dealt with. A developer in my constituency was given planning permission for a three-storey block of flats, but he just decided to add a fourth storey, totally overriding the concerns of the neighbours. The problem is that he received numerous letters from the Planning Service and decided to ignore them. The thing has now run for more than four years, and he now has planning permission. It is that blatant, overt disregard for the law that concerns me, not the likes of Willie-John who has a pallet business in the countryside that has been going for 20 years and which no one cares about.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Boylan: Thank you very much for that clarification. I agree with you, and we have heard of many similar examples. Last term, a south Belfast residents' association came before the Committee for the Environment and talked about non-compliance with conditions in certain buildings. You are right: in my constituency, developers have put on an extra floor, and there has been no enforcement. We want to look at that. I am thankful for the clarification about the four-year rule and the 10-year rule.

I want to know about the terms of the proposed review. When the Committee dealt with the new Planning Act that transfers powers to local authorities, we looked at the issue of fines, and Members questioned whether a fine of £100,000 would be reasonable. Years ago, fines of £30,000 were originally set for not complying with conditions relating, in some cases, to listed buildings. Bearing in mind what Mr Wells said about the price of some properties, I want the Minister to respond on when those fines are to come about.

We have all dealt with planning officials, who, in some cases, are under severe pressure on the matter of enforcement. On the one hand, they are trying to do the right thing by looking at the policy and judging everything on its merits; on the other hand, public representatives are writing letters in support of businesses and certain actions. We need to have a clear steer on where we want to go. As part of the new planning policy, I believe that there is a role for

collaboration between building control in local authorities and the Planning Service. I also believe that we could consider the initiation process for the start of building, and completion notices. I hope that the Minister will look at that.

I could give plenty of examples of what has been happening, and I have dealt with many's a case, but the underlying factor in this welcome debate is to try to find some resolution. Part of that will be for the Minister to consider moving forward the RPA process and to get down to working with community plans and local authorities. I would like the Minister to respond specifically on drawing a line in the sand in relation to businesses because of the present four- and 10-year rules. I know that legislation is coming on the five-year rule, and maybe the Minister will update us on where that stands.

I support the motion and a review of enforcement. I would like to hear more comments on how we actually address the issue instead of just leaving it in the lap of planning officials.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Members who tabled the motion. I enjoyed the earlier rant, which was well worth hearing. We could all talk about this issue for an hour or two because there are so many things that seem to be wrong with enforcement. We know that there is a resources problem, and people in the Planning Service deserve praise. We also know that we are in a sort of limbo, having enacted a 255-section Planning Act, which, in my brief time here, went through very vigorous checking. However, it is waiting for 16 or more guidelines and sets of rules, as well as council reform. As we have just heard, getting the RPA in place early would certainly help, although I still query whether we really want decisions to be made right down at council level. There is still more in the review, and I support the motion because we need to review how the system works today and how it will work as part of the new planning process.

We need to give the Planning Service the teeth and the tools to work with, and that is what the review should come up with. When I read the motion, I thought, gosh, it is open to questions of whether we are trying to review the whole planning system because that is where enforcement comes from, and we have to get the system right, whether we are just trying to review PPS 9, or whether we are trying to do something in the middle. The planning gamut is enormous, and we need to change it and get things happening quickly.

I have three examples of things that are wrong in my patch and that illustrate where we are failing. I have been to see the Minister about some of those matters. At Nutts Corner, illegal racetracks are continually putting in planning applications because nothing happens until they are refused. They keep applying and keep on racing, and anyone living nearby is plagued until the end of daylight. However, the legal racetrack is there, following the rules. We need to find a way to enforce the rules, some of which are from Westminster, some of which are from here, some are departmental matters, and some are council matters. We come back to the age-old question that plagues us here of joined-up government. We need everything working and pulling together if enforcement is to work.

Another example is at Bush Manor, above Antrim, where some 350 houses were to be built. The planners, with the developers, agreed to build private roads. Those roads were never finished because they were not of a standard or width that could be adopted. They remain unfinished. The developer has gone bust, and there is no way to get the roads finished. The people living in those houses go around from one agency to another. We need to give them the tools so that they can deal with the issue. We also need joined-up government.

The little bits of building that go on are another factor. So much building has happened near a house close to Randalstown that, whenever there is heavy flooding such as in 2008 or recently, the water flows quickly past all the new houses onto two older houses that end up under water. Again, we cannot pin anyone down. The family who live there have to live in another house. They cannot even take their own furniture out, because it has been soiled. Yet whose fault is it? We always see the system of joined-up government not working. Is it the responsibility of the Rivers Agency or Roads Service? Everyone starts blaming one another. We need people to start to work together and find a way forward rather than pass the buck.

What do we want in the system? We want an easy-to-understand and fair system with checks and balances. We want people to be able to take legal action and unauthorised activity to be controlled. However, what we really need to see driven through the system is common sense.

We very rarely seem to see common sense, because so often what is written means that we have to stick to the line of the PPS or precedent or consistency, and we find ourselves with a problem. Instead of looking at that one problem, we end up being influenced by a whole lot of previous decisions. We need to get common sense into the planning process.

If you look at PPS 9, you will see that it says that it does not deal with any calls that are not written down and that it has a priority system. We need to find some total system for dealing with every matter. Years ago —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you. Years ago, I worked at Shorts, and we had a total quality system, where everything had to be properly finished. I think that planners should, even if it is done by sample, go to every location, as they can, and check that development is following the rules. I support the motion.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the motion and immediately agree that it is one of the better topics to be used as a time filler. I suppose that planning has been a talking point for a very long time, unfortunately, often in negative terms and usually associated with bad practice, corruption, favouritism and downright lawlessness in serious breaches of the planning laws. I am not talking about the wee man in the countryside who wants to survive with his small business but about those who have ravaged our environment. Given that planning and, of course, planning enforcement may well be returned to local government at some time in the future, it is, indeed, right and proper that we debate how it should work for the good of our communities and individuals who often have their life turned upside down because enforcement does not happen.

The current Minister has been visiting the towns on the north coast, not only because his wife comes from there but because he is aware that some of the worst examples of unauthorised planning have taken place there. I am happy that he has a very good notion of exactly what bad planning means, particularly in coastal areas that are dependent on tourism.

Bad planning, of course, is coupled with a failure on the part of the Department to carry out enforcement. The two are interconnected. Frankly, the situation has, at times, been appalling and reckless and, in some cases, has amounted to gangsterism. All too often, the gangsters win.

On a positive note, it has to be said that many more offenders have been taken to court and, thankfully, heavily fined for unauthorised development. However, the decision of the courts in some areas has not been consistent — far from it. Let us hope that our Minister of Justice will take up that issue. Indeed, evidence given to me by planners suggests that it is not worth their while taking cases to court, because, by the time all the costs are met, they are out of pocket. That is wrong and needs to be changed.

When dealing with planning enforcement, we need to be mindful that enforcement is, indeed, dependent on good planning laws that are robust and respected by all, including elected representatives. In that respect, there is a lesson to take on board. Sadly and unfortunately, in the past, elected representatives have been only too happy to support inappropriate planning applications. They have done so in councils and in the Assembly. On some occasions, the work had already started, quite within the law as it stands, and elected representatives were compromised from the very beginning. In that respect, I hope that lessons have been learned and that we do not have letters of support for the most outrageous planning proposals, which should never be considered.

That practice over the years has given planning a bad name and, consequently, has impacted on the ability of the enforcement section of the Planning Service to act with the full support of elected representatives, who, at times, have been up to their necks in encouraging bad planning. Do you remember Knock Golf Club and the plethora of letters of support that went in for that outrageous planning development? Thankfully for the local community, that did not go ahead.

12.00 noon

Over the years, we have seen our built heritage destroyed, like a re-enactment of the Blitz. We have seen thousands of mature trees, fundamental to the health and well-being of our people, bulldozed and turned into firewood. We have seen the most grotesque monsters of apartments and other high buildings reach for the skyline, with no enforcement whatsoever. I have no doubt that the current Minister will end that, but it is well to understand that we elected

representatives cannot hunt with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

The history is not good; let us change it. There is no point in doing a Pontius Pilate job by washing our hands and blaming the planners when some of the most prominent politicians among us and within the North have been enthusiastically demanding intensive development. One example of that is at the Giant's Causeway, one of the wonders of the world. I rest my case.

Ms Lo: I thank the Members for securing a debate on this issue. The previous Environment Committee had the dubious honour of scrutinising the Planning Bill, the largest Bill to come before the Assembly. I do not think I need to remind Members of how onerous a task that was.

A recurring theme in that Bill, and, indeed, others, was that of enforcement. Members are very conscious that it is all very well introducing legislation, but unless is it going to be enforced, it is time wasted. One of the main objectives of the Planning Bill was to devolve planning functions to local councils. While scrutinising the Bill, Members wanted to know how the Department would oversee enforcement of planning decisions by councils, and whether there would be any mechanism to ensure consistency across different council areas.

The Department indicated that the devolution of planning functions to councils would undoubtedly result in variation between councils and that that was a natural consequence of devolving planning powers. However, the Department reminded the Committee that the audit powers provided in the Planning Act allow it to look at councils' delivery, and can be used to audit, review and encourage best practice.

The Committee asked about the expectation that councils would carry out enforcement activities. Was that a statutory function, for example, and what were the resource implications? The Department responded that enforcement would be demand-led and that it was impossible to say how much resource would be required as some councils may put more emphasis on enforcement than others.

I think that that is exactly what Members fear: inconsistency in approach from one council area to another. Any review of planning enforcement needs to take into account that planning will transfer to local authorities, and guidance should be issued to each council to ensure consistency of approach.

Another concern that Members raised was about enforcement practices to date, including the number of staff transferred in the Planning Service's enforcement section, and how the issue of legal costs influences decisions on enforcement action. The Department maintained that it had a general discretion to take enforcement action when it regarded it as expedient to do so, having regard to the provision of the development plan and any other material considerations. Members were content with that response but made it clear that, as there is a surplus of staff dealing with planning, it seems logical to redeploy some staff to work on enforcement.

The Committee also sought more information on current enforcement activity and costs, including an indication of the nature of breaches. The Department indicated that its key objectives for planning enforcement are: bringing unauthorised activity under control; remedying the undesirable effects of unauthorised development; and taking legal action where necessary. It stressed that all complaints are looked into, even though quite a high proportion are found not to be breaches.

Members accepted the Department's information but noted that councils were still very much in the dark on the issue and were deeply concerned about the future costs of the enforcement function that are not included in planning fees. Therefore, we must ensure that costs and resources are addressed before planning enforcement powers are transferred; otherwise, ratepayers' expectations will be falsely raised.

The Department is on record as having said that adequate resources will transfer to local councils, so, in that context, a review of planning enforcement would be timely and appropriate.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms Lo: I support the motion on behalf of the Environment Committee.

Mr Weir: I have been an MLA for only 13 years, so I do not have the build-up of frustration that Mr Wells has. I will express 13 years of ire rather than 29. The problem has been apparent to us all for some time.

As with Mr Wells, my first direct involvement with planning enforcement at government level was to take a delegation of residents from Donaghadee to meet the then Environment Minister, Sam Foster, and to try to give two messages to Planning Service: first, that it needed to take a more proactive approach to the issue; and, secondly, that it needed to push more cases to court, not just as a punitive measure but as a deterrent to those who would drive a coach and horses through the planning system.

It is unfortunate that the pleas that we made quite a long time ago seem to have gone unheeded through the years. Although some cases have been taken to court, that has happened too infrequently, and, on too many occasions, those who deliberately disobey planning law have felt an opportunity to go ahead and do whatever they want to do, in the belief that there is no real consequence to their actions.

There are constraints around resources, and I agree with Mr Wells that part of the problem lies with the courts. On many occasions when we have seen major breaches of planning law, we have seen paltry fines handed down, so there is a problem directly with the courts. However, on a broader level, there is also an issue of attitude and culture around which it would be helpful to take a stronger, more proactive approach.

The Assembly has focused on planning in recent years, culminating in the very lengthy Planning Bill, as Mr Kinahan, Mr Boylan and other Members will know. We covered a range of detail to do with planning control and development control and debated the merits of third-party appeals. The Assembly has considered the best way in which to build economic factors into planning applications, and there has been a considerable level of focus to that extent, although there is clearly more work to be done on the broad planning application side.

As an Assembly, we have not given enough attention to the other side of the coin, which is enforcement. Part of the purpose of the review is to focus on that side. Why is that important? It is important because, if there is no enforcement, it will lead to bad planning across the country. It will lead to illegal activity —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will develop the point and let Mr Wells in in a moment.

It can be deeply damaging to residents. In many cases, the planning applications that have been granted were at the upper limit of what the Planning Service allows, and they quite often went against residents' wishes. Another consequence arises when a developer builds beyond that.

To be honest, it is also damaging to developers themselves. Let us be fair about this: the vast majority of developers and people involved in the building trade obey the law fully. The small number of people who drive a coach and horses through planning legislation give the rest a bad name. It penalises those who are prepared to live within the law. I will give way to the Member.

Mr Wells: Does the Member also accept that, when the public see so many examples of developers getting away with blatantly disobeying planning legislation, the whole system is brought into disrepute? Many people, certainly developers who I know, feel that they should just go ahead and do the work because they will get approval somewhere along the line, and they forget about the views of residents and concerned neighbours.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Weir: I think that it damages the Planning Service's credibility. It also leads to a high-level and intense sense of frustration. Residents or next-door neighbours might complain about a particular development, but the system in many ways shrugs its shoulders and says, "Yes, we appreciate that it goes slightly beyond what was there, but sure we are not going to do a great deal about it."

I very much take on board what has been said in connection with the review. It is meant to deal with those who have very deliberately breached planning laws. There will always be retrospective applications in, for example, the case of someone who builds a conservatory without knowing that planning permission was required. Some allowance has to be made for that.

Similarly, I do not think that this has been set up to penalise economic activity.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I have only a minute left, Mr McCarthy.

Where balance is concerned, my sense is that this is much more of an urban and suburban

problem than a countryside problem. I am fairly open-minded about the review's precise terms of reference, and I am sure that all of us would be willing to work with the Minister on that. I think that some action can be taken fairly quickly.

Although the previous Bill dealt largely dealt with development control at the early stage and focused on the councils, elements of it dealt with enforcement. Not everything in that Bill is dependent or contingent on the devolution of powers to councils. We should fast-track whatever areas we can. As has been indicated, there are some good examples from other jurisdictions of what can be done. There are certain things to avoid; for example, the level of self-regulation in the Scottish system has its drawbacks.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Weir: There is a clear problem, and we should move towards having a review. I support the motion.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister admitted at Question Time yesterday that he did not have enough resources for planning enforcement. Enforcement seems to have been a weakness right across the Department since I have sat on the Environment Committee, whether it concerns taxi regulation, transportation of waste or general waste enforcement. That is obviously down to resources and priorities, and I am sure that the Minister will touch on it.

We talk about deterrents for major breaches in planning. When going through the planning legislation in the previous mandate, my colleagues and I pushed for the £100,000 increased fines. The Minister at the time was very reluctant to bring forward an amendment to the Bill. The Committee was forcing the issue continually, and the Department was extremely reluctant to increase the fines. I am glad that we got our way and that there are now increased fines for the demolition of listed buildings and the destruction of trees, which was a matter that Danny Kinahan was very passionate about. I am glad that we did good work on that. Although it was done over a short period, it was very worthy work.

Jim Wells talked about the building in Newcastle. It was a disgrace that that building was torn down, especially given the disruption that it caused to people's lives. However, it was a derelict building in an area of townscape character, and it had been there for 20 years. I think that there was a way around that. The Planning Service should have been proactive, gone to the owner of the building and, at the very least, come to an arrangement to replace the facade.

To leave a building up in an area of townscape character for 20 years after it was burned is an absolute disgrace, and there should have been a remedy in place before that conclusion was reached. The building was also throwing damp into neighbours' houses, and the Planning Service was wrong in allowing that to happen.

12.15 pm

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr W Clarke: I will in a minute, Jim.

Many of those big cases become protracted and get caught up in planning appeals and legal challenges. Ordinary citizens want simple enforcement issues to be dealt with. For example, although people may have a condition to their planning application for a single dwelling to demolish an existing building within one year, in many cases, that is never followed up. That is also the case with planting and other simple things. People are greatly frustrated about that.

Mr Wells: I am glad that the Member agrees with me about the notorious case in South Promenade. Down the road near Annalong, a gentleman applied to build one bungalow and decided to build two. That was nearly four years ago, and I know what will happen: in a few months' time, I will get a letter from the Planning Service: "Sorry, Mr Wells, it has gone past the four years, and there is nothing we can do." Does the Member not agree with me that it is most frustrating that we, as public representatives, when lobbied by our constituents, do not have a clue what is going on in either of those cases? We cannot be told, our constituents think that we are doing nothing for them, and all we get are letters from the Planning Service saying: "Sorry, we cannot reveal what is going on."

Mr W Clarke: I agree with Mr Wells about the frustration. When public representatives phone up planning enforcement, they are told that, under data protection, they are not allowed any information. It is very frustrating to go back to constituents to say that we tried our best but,

under data protection, we cannot give them any answers. It is frustrating and wrong.

I made a point about not taking down a building for a replacement dwelling. What happens is that the building then turns up as an agricultural store while enforcement proceedings are being carried out. If planning permission is granted at that stage, we are in the ironic situation that the building should not be there in the first place and, after the period of time during the application process for an agricultural store, there will be an application for a replacement building on that building. There is a great deal of frustration about that.

Through the new planning legislation, we have a good opportunity to improve the situation, bring community plans together, get area plans that are relevant to people's lives, bring everybody, including developers, community groups, councillors and other interested parties on board and have a good working community area plan that can deal with a lot of those situations.

Planning does not work in rural areas. It does not support rural dwellers in their way of life when people want to start up businesses. The most important manufacturing and engineering businesses were all born out of a barn or a garage in a rural area. There has to be flexibility so that people are allowed to change the use of buildings to be able to do some light engineering. Too often we are told that roads are not suitable or that such a use would take away from the character of an area. Rural jobs need to be provided in rural areas, and, too often, planning officials sit in city centres and make up rules for rural areas.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr W Clarke: I do not think that that is appropriate because if rural people stay in their communities, they will support local shops and schools.

Mr Hamilton: My apologies for not being here for the start of the debate. As frustrated as Members clearly are by many issues surrounding planning enforcement, it is a refreshing change that, in discussing and debating planning in the Chamber, we are not talking about the process and the system of getting approvals through. We are used to berating Environment Ministers and officials from the Planning Service about the lack of progress, particularly on major planning applications of economic significance. However, it has to be said — others have already remarked on it — that good, sound, solid planning enforcement is every bit as much part of the system as getting a refusal or an approval. In fact, without planning enforcement, in many cases a lot of the rest of the stuff is neither here nor there. Mr Wells has passionately outlined his views on this, and Jim has been involved in more planning cases than I have had hot dinners.

Mr Wells: Easily.

Mr Hamilton: Easily, yes. If you counted all the grey hairs on his head, you would not think that he is the same age as me. Planning has accounted for most of Jim's frustrations, and it comes out in everything he says. Jim is obviously very passionate about this, and I yield to his experience in a lot of cases. In fact, because of the way that our constituencies are lined up, sometimes Jim and I are involved in many cases together.

Mr Wells: Sometimes we are on the same side.

Mr Hamilton: Sometimes we are on the same side and sometimes not. I have seen and share a lot of his frustrations. Many Members have already produced their own evidence from their areas, and I do not wish to rehearse that. However, there is a debate and a discussion to be had about whether there are sufficient planning enforcement officers. There are around 58, and we must ask whether that is sufficient to do the task in hand. There is also a debate to be had about whether the fines, even though they have been increased, are sufficient — as Mr Clarke said — and whether there is a deterrent for individuals not to engage in some of the activities that they have been engaged in. We have already heard about cases where there have been paltry fines, and some of those same individuals are then involved in similar circumstances not too far away from where they engaged in their first activity. You wonder whether there is a deterrent there at all.

I want to say a bit more about the lack of information that we receive as elected representatives, and Mr Wells has already referred to that. It is not because I want to know about it, and it is not because Mr Wells or any of the rest of us wants to know; it is because the constituents who come to us want to know more. I am concerned that they think that we are not doing our job in making representations to the Planning Service on their behalf. A lot of people

refer their information to Planning Service themselves. However, in some cases, people come directly to us, as constituency MLAs, for assistance, and we give the information to Planning Service. Except for some basic information that comes back, it appears to go into some sort of black hole or a vortex, and, if you are lucky, you will get information at the end. I have seen cases where action has been taken but we did not receive the information until much later. It seems that such a simple, basic change could be made to planning enforcement to ensure that that information is available. It is not as though people want to delve into the nitty-gritty. Sometimes, a legal process is ongoing, which militates against giving out too much information. However, it would be useful to have regular updates beyond the basic information that we get to say that a site has been visited and that an investigation is ongoing, even if it is just to say that a legal process is under way and, therefore, more information cannot be given. If that information were given regularly, it would allow us to go back to our constituents and let them know that not only are we doing our job but that the system is working for them. Obviously, we are concerned on a personal level, as we want our constituents to know that we are doing our best for them.

Members have drawn on various examples that appear to show that the system is not working for our constituents, and other examples will come out later in the debate. There is a perception — in many cases, it is a reality — that the system is not seen to be working for people because they are not getting the basic information on a regular basis. That is something that I want to emphasise from my experience, and others have emphasised it too —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Hamilton: I hope that that is something that the Minister will take away from the debate and bear in mind in the future.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who tabled the motion. It raises a number of very important issues. Clearly, planning and its regulations impact on virtually every facet of economic and social development, because that is where the application for a project starts. A number of issues are involved, and forgive me if I get a wee bit technical, as I certainly do not have any command or grasp of some of them, unlike others in the House.

I want to be specific about particular issues. A number of issues came up relating to enforcement where there might at least have been common sense or there was a lack of consistency in the drive to take a court case, for example. I specifically mean a situation in which a live court action around enforcement is being taken by Planning Service and, simultaneous to that, there is a live planning application, which may or may not rectify the issues about which a case is being brought before the courts. From what I hear from agents, it seems that there is an inconsistency of approach by different divisional planning offices. Some will agree that the court action must be pursued; others will advise not to pursue the legal action against an applicant if, in fact, a potential solution may be derived from a further application to rectify or address those issues. That is one thing that Planning Service needs to address.

One other issue, which, I am sure, will resonate with other Members, relates to situations in which an application has been made for a housing development or a single house in the countryside, for instance, and, through the course of the night, a listed building or a wall, neither of which belong to or are in the control of the developer, has been demolished, or, likewise, a hedge has been removed. To my mind, that is an illegal action. My view is that, where an illegal action of that kind has been committed, it should nullify the planning application or at least cause a serious problem for that planning application. That is preferable to the attitude that is taken by Planning Service, which is to say that, as far as it is concerned, the site lines are in place and planning approval is granted. Planning Service walks away from it, and the person who owns the hedge, wall or house is duty-bound to take civil action through the court to prove that his or her property was illegally removed or demolished. That is a huge anomaly in planning. It is an issue of major frustration for people who see their property being spoiled illegally during the night.

Another issue that came up was that we know that the decisions of the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) are not binding, but they are usually complied with by the Department. I think that that should also be addressed. The Department should be fully bound to comply with decisions that are made by the PAC.

Mr Wells raised the issue of the 4-year rule. That is an issue on which I am slightly unclear. I have no issue with the 4-year rule, or 5-year rule, as it may become under the new regulation, if it is proven and sustainably proven retrospectively from the point of being seen or witnessed by Planning Service. However, I gathered from Mr Wells that it could be spun out protractedly at Planning Service over time until it becomes the four years. That should not be the case. In actual fact, I thought that it was the other way round and that the person had to prove it retrospectively from point of detection.

Mr Kinahan mentioned the enforcement of matters relating to unadopted streets such as street lighting. We have to get to grips with enforcement; it must be dealt with. Most of us know that, when a query is made, Roads Service responds with a letter saying that the matter is currently with its officials and that it will try to pursue it with the developer. It brings in the issue of bonds and the quicker and sharper enforceability of those bonds to bring them out to make sure that the estate is left properly. However, there is also a duty on the people who are buying houses there to make sure that they have a proper legal adviser who advises them on the issues around that.

The final point in all of this is that those are issues that are due to come over to local government as a result of the review of public administration. We want to make sure that sacrosanct for everyone is equality —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McGlone: Equality in the practices of those local councils must be enshrined at the heart of decision-making. Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. On return, the first item of business will be Question Time. The debate on the review of planning enforcement will resume after Question Time, and the Minister will give his response.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 1 has been transferred to the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) for a written answer. Questions 12 and 15 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Health and Social Care Services: Review

2. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the review of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. (AQO 692/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The review of health and social care (HSC) services is well under way. It is vital that we have a sustainable health and social care system for the future, and the review's conclusions and recommendations will be central to informing decisions on how that can best be achieved. The review is being conducted in an open and transparent manner, and the review team is continuing with a programme of extensive engagement with stakeholders and the public to collect views on the delivery of services. I look forward to receiving the team's report by the end of November.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for his answer. What does the Minister hope the review will achieve?

Mr Poots: We want to inform the future planning, development and delivery of HSC services. We also want to drive up the quality of care for clients and patients, improve outcomes, enhance the experiences of patients and clients and deliver efficient and cost-effective services. That is absolutely essential if we are to retain the model of health being free at the point of need in Northern Ireland.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister content that consultancy firms will have more influence in the

review than nurses, doctors, social workers and so on?

Mr Poots: I would certainly not be content if that were the case, and it will certainly not be the case. The public's viewpoint is very important, and we have some very clear ideas about where we are going in Northern Ireland.

I will say it clearly here and now: the system that we have is not a model that is sustainable into the future. We need to have a model of change and change for the better. Much of that will be about ensuring that we have more community and primary care and more cost-effective prevention and early intervention measures.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister give more details on any of the advice that has been given so far by the external advisory panel of five experts who have been appointed to examine health and social services?

Mr Poots: As Members will know, the review is not independent; it is being carried out on my behalf. I will seek to influence it as it proceeds, and we hope to get a positive outcome on where we can take healthcare in Northern Ireland.

I am absolutely clear that cure is not the best means of sorting things out when prevention could do so in the first instance. I will strongly support anything that takes us to the point at which we have more prevention and early intervention and less of the expensive cure model.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister envisage the review identifying further opportunities for cross-border collaboration or further work on all-island health strategies?

Mr Poots: I have made it clear to the House before that I do not see this as a political thing. We are working to provide cancer services for patients from Donegal in Altnagelvin Hospital, and we are building a fantastic new facility in the south-west. If people from the Irish Republic need services that can be supplied at that facility and will bring money into our economy and system, I am happy to work with my colleagues in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that those are provided. I want to have the best possible services in Northern Ireland, and, if that means services being bought in from outside Northern Ireland, I am happy to work with others in doing that.

Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust

3. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will seek extra funding in the Budget monitoring rounds for the Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust. (AQO 693/11-15)

Mr Poots: Responsibility for the commissioning of services, including music therapy, rests with the Health and Social Care Board. I am advised that, following the submission of a plan by the Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust, the board has agreed to interim funding of £75,000 for one year, targeting services particularly on children with autism.

I am continuing to engage with other Departments on potential alternative sources of funding for future years, although that depends on relative funding priorities being agreed by the Executive.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his answer. He mentioned the interim funding that has been secured for the service. What work is he doing to secure more long-term funding, given the vital contribution that the Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust makes towards departmental objectives of helping people with autism, acquired brain injury and dementia? In particular, is the Minister making an application to the social protection fund for that service?

Mr Poots: Certainly, we recognise the role of music therapy in the care and treatment of children with learning disabilities. As evidence of that, after the children's fund ceased, the Department extended funding for a further three years, so it is something from which we can see a real benefit. We have been working with other Departments to make the case. The criteria set for applications to the social protection fund are designed specifically to target poverty, and they would not support a bid for music therapy. We made a number of bids for funding from the social protection fund that were rejected by OFMDFM. The criteria for applications to the fund were amended to apply only to fuel poverty. That needs to be changed if we are to benefit from it, but it is a matter for another Department. However, we want to work with other Departments to identify a solution.

Mrs McKevitt: Will the Minister seek extra funding in the Budget monitoring rounds for IVF treatment in order to give the patients the three doses that are required for success?

Mr Poots: It is a bit of a leap from music therapy to IVF, even in the imagination of the SDLP. It is a nice try, nonetheless. We have not sought additional funding in the monitoring round for IVF treatments. We have been looking at ensuring that we can get a second course of treatment for people who are receiving IVF. We know how important that is to individuals; we recognise that, and there is a means of doing that. I would be happy to receive a question for written answer from the Member on that subject at any time.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister consider finding mainstream funding for music therapy in the future?

Mr Poots: Essentially, this involved money that was derived from the children's fund. I had a very useful meeting yesterday with junior Ministers Anderson and Bell about how we take forward children's and young people's issues and about how a subgroup of the Executive could achieve the maximum impact in that role. I will work with other Ministers in devising that. That may provide an opportunity to look at some areas that do not necessarily fall within the remit of one Department but have significant benefits beyond Departments and where we could operate as a subgroup with its own budget.

Mr Cree: The Minister has touched on this subject. He mentioned the junior Ministers. Has he talked to his counterpart the Education Minister with a view to exploring the use of music therapy for schoolchildren who have verbal communication difficulties?

Mr Poots: In education, there are a number of things that can significantly benefit children, particularly with speech defects and other issues around autism and so forth. We are very happy to work with the education board in that respect.

Health and Social Care Services: Commissioning

4. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to enhance the commissioning of health and social care services at local level. (AQO 694/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my statement to the Assembly of 27 September on the health and social care review, I outlined that:

> *"My vision for the future of health and social care services is that we drive up the quality of care for clients and patients, improve outcomes and enhance the patient and client experience." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 66, p322, col 2].*

Effective commissioning is key to achieving that vision. I believe that more powerful local commissioning of services can drive change, innovation and service improvement, so that patients are seen at the right time and in the right setting by the most appropriate health and care provider. In Northern Ireland, we have five local commissioning groups, which are the committees of the Regional Health and Social Care Board. Those are led by primary care professionals and include members from the voluntary and community sector and local government.

Local commissioning groups are responsible for assessing local health and social care needs in their respective areas and for developing services to meet those needs. The local commissioning groups have a role to play in helping to drive forward the changes that we need.

Mr Newton: May I express my particular concern to the Minister about the meals on wheels service at a time when our older population is increasing? All the figures indicate that the number of those in receipt of meals on wheels, which must be nutritionally beneficial, is falling and that there is a variation in charges for them across Northern Ireland.

Mr Poots: First, I fully recognise the Member's concerns. Meals on wheels is an excellent service that helps to ensure that older people can stay in their own home. When I dealt with the issue of dementia in my statement earlier, I said that one of our aims was to ensure that those people can stay in their own home. Perhaps we should take a closer look at how we can ensure that that service is a sustainable model that can help us to achieve our aims, which include providing more care for our elderly in their home and ensuring that they have the choice to remain in their own home for as long as possible.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I concur with Mr Newton's sentiments on community meals. Is the Minister aware of the issue of osteoporosis? Given the high cost of a hip operation and, more worryingly, the very high mortality rates for over-75s who break their hips, when the Committee

met the five chairs of the local commissioning groups, one of the things that they talked about was ensuring that people had slippers to prevent falls. Is the Minister conscious of the need to invest in preventative care to try to save people's lives?

Mr Poots: People can take steps to avoid osteoporosis by having the right diet for a considerable time. A lot of foods will help bones and will help to avoid osteoporosis developing later. Yes, it is important that we go down the preventative route. That is why we are spending £70 million on the Public Health Agency (PHA), which is responsible for the distribution of that money. I encourage the Member to engage with PHA on that issue to see whether we can get a better outcome than she is, perhaps, suggesting.

Ms P Bradley: What engagement has the Minister had with the chairs of the local commissioning groups, and what assessment has he made about their commitment to change?

Mr Poots: I have met the local commissioning groups on a number of occasions. Indeed, I met them in the past couple of weeks. In my view, they need to take ownership of what they have responsibility for, and they need to give the lead in identifying what funding goes to trusts and where that funding should be spent. I am keen that the HSC in conjunction with the local commissioning groups ensure that the money that they identify is appropriate and that the areas of spend will achieve the best outcomes. I trust that that work will be ongoing and that they will even be reinvigorated as a result of our more recent meetings.

Mr Agnew: What is the Minister's assessment of the model of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in providing integrated services and integration between agencies?

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland, we are very fortunate to have an integrated health and social care system. Believe it or not, others around the world look on in envy at the fact that we have such a system here. A lot of the problems that they have in England — for example, bed blocking — that result from a council looking after social services and a hospital looking after health are issues that we have managed to diminish greatly over the years. Therefore, an integrated system that integrates agencies as far as possible is very important. I look forward to community planning being developed through local government so that we can integrate the system even further, bring others into providing us with the evidence of where we require spending to go and ensure that the money follows that evidence.

2.15 pm

Dementia Strategy

5. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the introduction of a dementia strategy. (AQO 695/11-15)

Mr Poots: As you will be aware, I made a statement to the Assembly earlier today on the publication of a regional strategy for improving dementia services in Northern Ireland. Dementia care is an important issue facing us all, and the expected increase in the number with dementia will bring further pressures on our health and social care services. The aim of the strategy is to write a framework for HSC commissioners in the design of improved dementia services.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, Deputy Speaker and Minister. I would like to ask the Minister whether training will be available for all health workers dealing with people suffering from dementia. The issue of dementia is close to many of our hearts, and a number of my relatives suffer from it. I would be grateful if the Minister could state whether such training will be available for all health workers.

Mr Poots: In the strategy, we identified that we would improve training and make more training available to key workers. It is fundamental that those who work with older people with dementia are appropriately skilled. That is one of the aims of the new dementia strategy.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Tá ceist agam air faoi na háiseanna atá ar fáil don straitéis seo. How effective can the strategy be, if there are no new resources to drive it forward?

Mr Poots: I think that that demonstrates a fair degree of small-mindedness in that you cannot think outside the box. You think that there is an inability to do anything unless you throw more money at it. Very often, we create more problems by throwing considerable amounts of money at things without thinking them through

properly. It is important that we identify how we can improve and do things better and live within our means. If we do not do so, we will be setting ourselves a major problem in years to come. I do not want Northern Ireland to be like Greece. There is a song 'We're not Brazil, we're Northern Ireland'; in this instance, it is a case of 'We're not Greece, we're Northern Ireland'. We will live within our means.

Mr Kinahan: I very much welcome the dementia strategy. Does the Minister plan to create legislation on dementia in order to back the strategy? If not, what other plans will he put in place to enforce it?

Mr Poots: At this stage, we are satisfied that we have brought forward the strategy. We think that it will be well used and that it is a good opportunity for us to engage strongly with the HSC, PHA and the trusts in order to ensure that the quality of care for people suffering from dementia is driven up. At this stage, we do not need to introduce further legislation to deal with those matters.

Mr Dunne: Following on from the Minister's statement earlier today, will he advise us how much is being spent on dementia services?

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland, we spend a considerable amount on the elderly. We have to make effective use of our resources. For example, we are already spending around £250 million on health and social care for people with dementia. People talk about spending more money; however, it is incumbent on me as Minister to ensure, first and foremost, that the quarter of a billion pounds that we are already spending is well spent and utilised and that we maximise that resource.

Hospital Appointments

6. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what adjustments are made for people who live in rural areas and have long distances to travel for hospital appointments. (AQO 696/11-15)

Mr Poots: For all patients, including those from rural areas, the booking system employed by the health and social care trusts allows for patients to arrange their outpatient appointments for a date and time that suits them. For a first outpatient appointment, for example, patients are offered an appointment within six weeks that they can change if it does not suit them. If the follow-up appointment is within six weeks, they can choose a date and time before leaving the hospital. That greatly benefits patients who have family or work commitments or, indeed, those who have to travel longer distances.

In addition, there are a number of mechanisms to assist patients to attend appointments, which include the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service's patient care service. It provides prebooked non-emergency transport for patients who are assessed by a medical practitioner as requiring transport, taking into account the needs of individual patients and the hospital travel cost scheme, which assists patients on low incomes or in receipt of certain social security benefits who do not meet the clinical criteria and cannot meet the cost of travel to hospital. For other patients, health and social care trusts encourage service users to use other forms of public transport.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he seek to implement any changes to his Department's policy so that it will work more closely with the Department for Regional Development to allow hospital patients to avail themselves of community transport operators? As rural MLAs, we get feedback that, often, people are unable to afford to travel long distances to hospital appointments.

Mr Poots: First, I am responsible for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Our responsibility is to provide healthcare, not transport. The project 'Rural Voices Matter', which was launched by the Patient and Client Council, was aimed at understanding Northern Ireland's rural dwellers' perspective on health and social care services. Its final report, which presented views on helping HSC policy and commissioning, was presented to rural communities. One key finding that it identified was the transport issue. Problems were cited that included a lack of transport services or poorly publicised transport services. People who commented on the distance to travel to particular services focused on GP out-of-hours services, inpatient facilities and maternity services. I would like to transform the system so that we move further away from hospital services and towards primary care services. I would like to get to the point where more diagnostics are carried out at local primary

care facilities than in hospitals. I think that we can change the system in the longer term.

I am concerned that, at the moment, the Department, which is not a Department of transport, spends around £18 million on transport. I understand that, in some instances, people who are in receipt of DLA and have DLA mobility cars are actually getting transport paid for them to get to hospital. Those issues concern me when the Department has a fairly modest budget for the work that it is expected to carry out.

Mr Campbell: The Minister referred to customers' flexibility with regard to hospital appointments. Indeed, people have indicated that that flexibility has been recognised and welcomed. Can he indicate whether, in the coming year, as budgets continue to be straitened, people will continue to have that flexibility to access the health services that they require, particularly in rural areas?

Mr Poots: Flexibility is good for everyone. It is good for hospitals and patients. The system that has been introduced encourages flexibility. It helps people, particularly in rural communities, who may not be able to get to a hospital as early as others who live closer to it. It is my intention to ensure that we certainly do not diminish flexibility. If there are opportunities to increase it, we will do so.

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister accept that it is crucial that there is an ambulance service in isolated rural areas and that its crews are trained to high nursing standards? Can he outline whether there are any proposals to ensure that the Ambulance Service is maintained fully?

Mr Poots: West Tyrone is one of the constituencies where Ambulance Service crews were upskilled at an early stage. That was partly because of the situation with Omagh hospital and the services that it provided. Therefore, there is a much higher-quality Ambulance Service than was the case even a decade ago because of the upskilling that has taken place. Many people who have concerns about hospitals, casualty units and so forth can take some encouragement from the quality of the Ambulance Service and its personnel now. It is hugely beneficial in ensuring that lives are saved when people encounter catastrophic incidents, such as heart attacks, strokes and, indeed, major trauma incidents.

DHSSPS: Budget 2011-12

7. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's in-year budgetary position. (AQO 697/11-15)

Mr Poots: DHSSPS entered 2011-12 facing an unprecedented level of financial challenge and significant service pressures. However, we have been making good progress on resolving the financial difficulties. My expectation is that a balanced financial position can be achieved for 2011-12, although there is still an unresolved current expenditure gap to be managed.

The capital allocation for 2011-12 is fully committed, and a balanced financial position is anticipated. That has not been easy and has required a wide-ranging reworking of plans and savings proposals across all elements of my Department's budget. However, while cash balance in 2011-12 has been substantially achieved, I am increasingly concerned that, to some extent, it has been at the expense of standards and quality of care. In that context, I wrote to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to request additional funding of £47 million for specialist drugs, unmet residual demand and an invest-to-save fund for a number of capital projects. I am pleased to report that £25 million of those bids were approved in the October monitoring round for specialist drugs and an invest-to-save fund for capital projects. Those additional funds will make a real difference to the availability of healthcare for the people of Northern Ireland, while providing my Department with a sound basis on which to start addressing the significant financial challenges in future years.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his answer. As a result of the funding that has been secured through the monitoring round, what specialist drugs does the Minister anticipate will be available?

Mr Poots: It will enable the purchase of anti-TNFs for the biological treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. The intention is to reduce the waiting list for that from nine months to three months, which will make a real difference. It will also assist in the provision of cochlear implants. We want to reduce the backlog in NICE technical appraisals, including treatment for cancer, hepatitis C, growth failure in children, rheumatoid arthritis and eye disease, and it means that we will now be able to provide drugs that will make a real difference, at least,

to relieving symptoms and, in some cases, to extending people's lives.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister consider finding capital from within his budget for the purchase of DEXA scanners, given the change in policy on osteoporosis from April 2012?

Mr Poots: At this point, the capital budget is allocated. I should explain that our capital budget is around £800 million over four years. Around £100 million of that is spent annually on maintenance. Around £300 million was spent on the south-west acute hospital in Fermanagh. Therefore, those issues will consume most of our capital budget.

I am looking at how we can reorder things to ensure that we can provide a wider range of services in respect of the capital estate and carry out considerable improvements to it. I hope to bring something to the House in due course on that matter.

Mr Dickson: Minister, given all the pressures on health and social care budgets, can you tell us what actions you are taking to ensure that the budgets are properly distributed among all the users to ensure that adequate efforts have been made to address waiting lists?

Mr Poots: We are taking a number of steps. PEDU is carrying out work that will look further at administration management and seek to cut out anything that is unnecessary and does not affect front line services.

In terms of the organisation of the healthcare system, the Compton review is taking place and will report quite soon. I hope that it will give us some guidance on how we can do things better. Aside from that, I have established a team in the Department that is looking at the capital infrastructure and how we can develop a capital infrastructure that will assist us in switching services from hospitals to primary care and ensuring that we can carry out those services in prevention and early intervention and managing conditions in a better way, thus saving money that can be spent on other areas of health.

2.30 pm

Justice

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 2, 8 and 9 have been withdrawn. Questions 2 and 8 require written answers.

Alcohol: Minimum Pricing

1. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the proposals to introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol.
(AQO 706/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): As I understand it, the proposals for minimum unit pricing concentrate on major health consequences and are being taken forward jointly by the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). In my response to the recent public consultation, however, I recognised the potential criminal justice benefits to removing cheap alcohol, as police analysis of crimes during 2010 suggested that alcohol was a contributory factor for 44% of all those arrested.

On 1 November, the Scottish Government introduced a Bill to establish a minimum price for a unit of alcohol in Scotland. I will listen with interest to the discussions and monitor progress. It is important to note, however, that although the introduction of minimum pricing should make a valuable contribution to reducing damage to health in individuals and communities, the proposal on its own will not solve the problem of alcohol misuse.

Mr Wells: It was an extraordinary revelation from the Minister that alcohol is a factor for 44% of those arrested. That is, I think, the first time that that figure has been in the public domain, and I thank him for it. We believe that the cost to health and social services could be as much as £600 million or £700 million a year. Will he give an estimate of how much that same problem of alcohol abuse costs his Department?

Mr Ford: Similarly, in last year's report, the estimated cost of alcohol-related crime to the Department of Justice (DOJ) — policing, prisons and court services — was £382 million for the year. I am always suspicious of a figure that

purports to be so precise, but it is clear that it is an extremely substantial amount.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Minister may be aware, the vast majority of alcohol — up to approximately 70% — is now consumed in the home rather than in pubs. On the issue of minimum pricing, has the Minister engaged, or does he intend to engage, with the larger retailers who sell alcohol?

Mr Ford: As I said, it is really an issue for DSD and DHSSPS, so I have not engaged with any retailers. However, I am keeping a close eye on developments in Scotland, on what has already been done through banning cheap promotions and on its current proposal to introduce minimum pricing.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-Leas Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé. Tá ceist agam faoi mholtaí eile atá ag an Aire ar an cheist seo.

What other measures does the Minister feel would be useful in the reduction of alcohol-fuelled crime?

Mr Ford: Again, we are looking at an issue that goes significantly beyond the remit of my Department, but there are clearly particular issues with underage drinking. Such issues relate to the sale of alcohol to minors and to those who purchase alcohol on behalf of minors. Problems with irresponsible promotions of alcohol also need to be addressed. Of course, we also have the issue of the role of councils in enforcing the laws on drinking in public places and the way in which such by-laws are put together. None of those responsibilities is principally for my Department, but the Department of Justice is certainly prepared to co-operate with other Departments in doing what we can to reduce the damage caused by alcohol.

Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme

3. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Justice what action he has taken to ensure that the security breach in relation to the police part-time Reserve gratuity scheme has been addressed effectively. (AQO 708/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I said in my statement on 22 August, steps were taken to deal with concerns about the issuing of part-time Reserve gratuity scheme letters. A security assessment was requested immediately, and a helpline was set up so that concerned individuals could contact the Department. Details provided by individuals who contacted DOJ about their safety were passed to the relevant authorities.

I also directed that a review be conducted into the circumstances surrounding the issue of the letters. That review included an assessment of the physical and information technology security measures at the fund's premises. I have now received a report of the review and notified the Justice Committee of its outcome and conclusions. In short, the report finds that although the fund has robust security arrangements in place, the use of window envelopes was inappropriate in the circumstances and caused considerable concern.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will not be surprised to be challenged by the opinion that personal safety fears have increased because of the breach. He has, in part, admitted that. Does he believe that further support is necessary to alleviate those fears, which remain real?

Mr Ford: I accept that there are real fears. That is why specific work was done to follow up the security issue in general and with individuals who had identified particular concerns. The various security measures that apply to individuals are available if they are justified in any circumstance. Efforts are being made across the Department to ensure that lessons are learned from this situation. However, it is not possible to deal with the fears of the individual in a way that will guarantee the removal of those fears. I can simply give a commitment that we are doing all that we can to ensure that concerns are addressed in an appropriate way.

Mr McGlone: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his response. How many people have had to move home as a consequence of these matters?

Mr Ford: It would be inappropriate to deal with questions of that sort by going into detail, suffice to say that the appropriate measures have been offered to individuals and, where necessary, taken by them.

Mr Dickson: Minister, you will know that, at the time, I congratulated you on your quick response in establishing the investigation into these matters. *[Interruption.]* You have told us that lessons have been learned as a result of

that investigation, and the spotlight fell on the police fund. Have you shared those experiences with Executive colleagues so that not only your Department but other Departments may learn from instances of similar breaches? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Ford: I am pleased that my colleague has such a fan club immediately to my left. It is a serious issue, which should not be treated in such a way. The simple answer is that the Department of Justice is in a very different position from that of other Departments when it comes to security issues such as this. Therefore, the lessons learned have not been shared with other Departments, but have been shared across DOJ, its agencies and arm's-length bodies to ensure that the difficulties that arose in August 2010 are not only learned by all those sections of the Department and other bodies for which we have responsibility, but applied.

Resettlement of Offenders

4. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the Criminal Justice Inspection's latest report on the resettlement of offenders. (AQO 709/11-15)

Mr Ford: I welcome the latest Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) report on prisoner resettlement by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). The report highlights progress in a wide range of areas, including the co-location of offender management teams and the appointment of additional probation officers and NIPS staff; a better environment for some life-sentence prisoners; better engagement with the community and voluntary sector; more consistent delivery of drugs and alcohol services; and a greater effort to address the resettlement needs of short-term and remand prisoners. However, the report also goes on to stress that there is still a need to develop better outcomes for prisoners.

The report makes 22 recommendations, four of which are strategic. One suggests that a high-level, multi-agency resettlement oversight group should be re-established by NIPS. Another is directed at the wider Department on issues such as fine defaulting, improving cross-departmental working and the accommodation of male under-18-year-olds. CJINI recognises that the Prison Service cannot deliver resettlement alone. The rehabilitation and successful reintegration of offenders in society will require partnership working at operational and strategic levels. I have already underlined my determination to ensure that a more joined–up response to reducing offending is given a high priority. Indeed, that is a challenge for us all.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept that the lack of obvious progress on outcomes for prisoners, which was highlighted in the CJINI report, is extremely worrying? Will he address that trend in order to drive down reoffending?

Mr Ford: It is clearly worrying that we have not achieved as much as we would have wished. That is why, when I launched the prison review team report, I said that the next six months would be crucial in turning around the direction of the Prison Service and ensuring that it was focused in a meaningful way. That is also why today's announcement about the staff exit scheme is focused on right-sizing Prison Service staff and on ensuring that we get the cultural change so that we move towards having a Prison Service that is directed more towards rehabilitation than pure security and that makes society safer by rehabilitating prisoners and reducing reoffending.

Mr S Anderson: Does the Minister agree that although we seek to provide for the care and resettlement of offenders, we must never forget the need to care for and protect their victims?

Mr Ford: Of course. I think that I refer to the needs of victims and the need to ensure that we protect them on almost every occasion that I speak in the Chamber. The substantive question was on the rehabilitation of offenders. One way of reducing the number of victims is to rehabilitate offenders and prevent reoffending.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. When the Minister published the prison review report, he pledged that we would see many elements of a reform programme within six months. Today's announcement of a voluntary redundancy scheme shows that he was, as usual, genuine in doing what he said. Will the Minister advise the House whether that scheme will have an impact on resettlement outcomes for prisoners?

Mr Ford: I certainly trust that we will see significant changes in outcomes for prisoners. Let us be clear: the Prison Service remains one that has developed from the prisons that were required in the 1980s. There is a focus on

security, even though we have seen significant good work being done in recent years. Last week, I opened the Donard centre in Maghaberry jail, which is focused on providing care for the most vulnerable prisoners to ensure their better rehabilitation. Today's announcement of the exit scheme recognises the need to allow those who have served in difficult times to leave with dignity and to refresh the staff, to change the culture and to ensure that that culture is directed at reform and rehabilitation.

At the end of the day, the success of the Prison Service in ensuring a safer society will be the success of not just locking people up but of ensuring that they do not reoffend when they come out. The combined changes that we are proposing in staffing, structures, estate and culture will make the difference that the Prison Service needs so that it can contribute to the needs of this society.

Office of the Police Ombudsman: Criminal Justice Inspection Report

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ceist uimhir a cúig, please.

5. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Justice whether he accepts in full the Criminal Justice Inspection report on the Office of the Police Ombudsman. (AQO 710/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have just about enough language for that. As I said to the Committee for Justice on 19 September, I have accepted all the recommendations of the CJINI report. I reiterated that on 20 September. The inspection report rightly highlights the challenges that the office faces in a number of areas, not least in dealing with historical cases. I expect there to be a full implementation process that is capable of independent validation. That validation will be provided by CJINI.

There is essential work to be done to improve the operation of the Office of the Police Ombudsman, and there is a need to take swift and robust action in a number of different areas. The ombudsman and his senior management team have developed an action plan that outlines how they plan to address the report's recommendations. Progress is already being made, and I recently met the ombudsman and his senior team to seek the assurance that they fully understand the extent and importance of the work that is to be done. The months that lie ahead are critical in allowing that process to progress. That is an important step towards the restoration of public confidence in the office.

Al Hutchinson has now signalled his desire to leave office by the end of January 2012. However, he and his senior staff have expressed to me their commitment to implementing the necessary changes to the office. The months that lie ahead are critical in allowing that process to progress. It is an important step towards restoration of public confidence. I have offered assistance to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in their endeavours to find a replacement for the ombudsman.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. When the ombudsman addressed the Justice Committee, he said that all changes to his reports were based on evidence. Subsequently, Michael Maguire said in his report that he could see no evidence for the changes that were made to those reports. The ombudsman, in the 'Spotlight' programme, actually agreed with that, so can the Minister see why people do not have confidence in the office at the moment? When the current ombudsman goes, it is essential that the Department of Justice does some sort of outreach work to build up that confidence again.

2.45 pm

Mr Ford: I accept Jennifer McCann's point about the need to ensure public confidence in the working of the office. I need to be careful that the Department of Justice does not interfere in the operational responsibilities of the office. The appropriate role for the Department, as the sponsoring body, is to ensure the appropriate length of governance for an arm's-length agency. It is clear that, with the intention of the current ombudsman to leave his post by the end of January, the opportunity now arises for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to make the appointment of a new ombudsman, and it will be the role of the Department of Justice to assist in building up confidence under the new regime.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to switch off mobile phones. They are interfering with the system.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister agree that to restore confidence in such a central office in the new beginning to policing, it is imperative that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister

move immediately to appoint a new Police Ombudsman and that that person be available to start work by the end of January 2012?

Mr Ford: I agree with Conall McDevitt's first point; it is essential that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister proceeds as speedily as possible. I met the First Minister and the Acting deputy First Minister nearly three weeks ago, and they were hoping to set up the interview panel and make arrangements for that within a few days of that. That is their responsibility. The Department of Justice has offered assistance but, as far as I am aware, my officials have not been asked for any further assistance in the couple of weeks since then. However, I suspect that having someone in post by the end of January is simply not possible because of the timescale that is required, given the likely period of notice that any individual who would be appointed would require and the time that is taken for vetting. That will require arrangements to continue and, clearly, we need to have a new appointment made as soon as possible.

Mr B McCrea: If the ombudsman were to leave by the end of January and no replacement were to be in situ — you have said that having a replacement by then is unlikely — what would be the impact for the office of the ombudsman?

Mr Ford: From the legal advice that has been given to the Department, it is my understanding that it is possible for the functions of the ombudsman to be performed by any officer who is authorised by the ombudsman and that if such a delegation were in place when the ombudsman were to vacate office for whatever reason, those delegated powers would continue. Therefore, it is possible for the office to continue to function but, clearly, certain issues may well require the incoming ombudsman to take personal responsibility. That means that the office could continue but, perhaps, there would be practical limitations as to the duties that would need to be performed in person by the incoming ombudsman.

Policing Board: Staffing

6. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Justice what progress has been made in reducing the number of staff at the Northern Ireland Policing Board. (AQO 711/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following an organisational review of the Policing Board by KPMG, the board has endorsed the recommendations to reduce the number of staff from 64 to 49. I understand that 60 staff are in post and that work continues to implement those recommendations as quickly as possible.

Mr Spratt: How much will that reduce the requirement on the budget of the Policing Board, which is almost £9 million? As a result of the reduction in staff numbers, have any packages had to be paid from the public purse, and if so, how much were they?

Mr Ford: Those issues are probably for the direct management of the Policing Board; it is an arm's-length body, and I should not be getting in to that level of detail. Mr Spratt has made the entirely valid point that the Policing Board, as with all the other DOJ arm's-length bodies, has to live within its budget. The future position for all the Department's agencies and, indeed, for DOJ is one of tight finances. So-called ring-fencing merely means that we get the same cuts that are applied to the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office in England and Wales. I will do my best to ensure that the board is assisted in living within those new financial restrictions, but the detail of how that is carried out has to be for the board.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the staff reductions were a result of the KPMG organisational review? I think that he said in his previous answer that the staff reduction was from 64 to 49. Does he agree that it is not just about the budget but the more efficient running of the Policing Board and that good progress has been made in that a number of posts have been suppressed? There are also posts that need to filled, and people are waiting for voluntary transfer to the NICS (Northern Ireland Civil Service).

Mr Ford: That is my understanding. No doubt Gerry Kelly, as a member of the Policing Board, is as up to date on the specific work of the board as I am. I understand that a number of staff are either planning retirement or seeking transfer to the NICS. That will help to reduce the board's staff numbers. Mr Kelly reiterates the point that I just made in response to Jimmy Spratt: the efficient management of the Policing Board, as with every agency of the DOJ, will be crucial as we look at a difficult four-year financial period.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Minister reassure the Assembly that any staff reductions will not adversely affect the effectiveness or efficiency of the Policing Board?

Mr Ford: I am certainly concerned to ensure that the Policing Board continues to play its vital role as one of the key features of the policing settlement that is now in place for 10 years. I understand that KPMG's work was around ensuring proper efficiency, the best use of staff and budget, and that the cuts in staff numbers, although quite significant, should not impinge in any way on the efficiency and effectiveness of the board's operations. However, it is clearly an issue for the board to ensure that it manages within its budget. My officials, in their governance role, will be assisting to ensure that the board continues to function well.

Antisocial Behaviour

7. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Justice what measures his Department is taking to address antisocial behaviour. (AQO 712/11-15)

Mr Ford: Tackling antisocial behaviour is a key priority for the Department of Justice. In the Assembly debate on 18 October, Members will recall that I outlined the graduated approach that my Department has adopted to address such behaviour. That approach is based on prevention, intervention and enforcement measures, and has contributed to a reduction of over 20% in incidents of antisocial behaviour since 2008.

The measures taken by my Department include initiatives such as CCTV, community safety wardens, neighbourhood watch schemes, intergenerational projects and priority youth intervention programmes. I intend to build on the success to date and to develop partnership working at a local level to support communities in addressing antisocial behaviour issues that matter locally. In particular, the new policing and community safety partnerships (CSP) will have a pivotal role in developing partnership working at a local level and in supporting communities in identifying solutions to issues of local concern. Furthermore, I intend to publish an agreed strategy, with buy-in from other Departments and key stakeholders, by the end of this year. I should stress, however, that although my Department will have a key role in building safer shared and confident communities, that ambition will be realised only by obtaining commitments from key stakeholders to address the wider social issues that pertain. To that end, I would welcome any support from the Assembly.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Given the recent Assembly debate on antisocial behaviour, will he reiterate the consensus of the Assembly that giving the police more powers, especially ones for which they have not asked, is not the best way to tackle this type of crime?

Mr Ford: Gosh — and my party colleagues get accused of issuing planted questions. I think that the mood of the Assembly was quite clear on that occasion. Although some were looking at the issue of police powers, the majority recognised that what was needed was joined-up working, appropriate targeted interventions based on prevention and early intervention, dealing with issues before they arise and become major problems of criminal justice matters or antisocial behaviour, and ensuring that the appropriate mechanisms are in place, combining the work of many Departments. There are clearly significant responsibilities not only for my Department but for others including the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education, and the Department for Employment and Learning.

I believe that, if we can build those kinds of partnerships, if we can see that the work of the new policing and community safety partnerships at local level helps to bring agencies together, and if we can ensure that that is a joined-up approach in every respect, we will continue the good work that has, as I highlighted in my original answer, reduced antisocial behaviour by over 20% in three years against a target of 15%. It is not often that, in the field of justice, you can exceed your targets as well as that. The Assembly should notice the value of the work that has been done and the progress that has been made in that sort of area.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin.

I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that restorative processes and procedures not only play a key part in intervention but can take away many of the issues around antisocial behaviour?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Raymond McCartney on the value of restorative approaches. We see them in both informal community settings and formal youth justice settings. Maybe we should ask whether there is a case for looking at greater use of restorative practice with younger adult offenders rather than merely with youth offenders.

Two or three months ago, when I visited the Member's constituency, I met the youth justice team in Derry and saw extremely positive work being done. I also met a young offender, the parent of another young offender and some victims who talked about the role that they had played in youth conferencing and the restorative practice of bringing home to offenders the damage that they have done to the wider community, sometimes without any awareness of how the consequences of their actions affect others.

Clearly, there is a lesson. In terms of its practical effect and its financial efficiency, extending restorative practices will almost certainly contribute to the wider safer society strategy that we want.

Mrs McKevitt: I welcome the fact that the CSPs will be involved in schemes to tackle antisocial behaviour. Does the Minister agree that any such schemes should in the future be agreed with the district policing partnerships (DPP), alongside the CSPs, before implementation?

Mr Ford: Karen McKevitt's point has just highlighted the key reason why we are seeking to bring together the work of CSPs and DPPs to build the new policing and community safety partnerships and to ensure that we get all the relevant agencies together in the one meeting so that they can consider the range of options for dealing with the appropriate needs, whatever they may be, of local communities. This is not a matter for central direction from DOJ or anywhere else in this estate. It is a matter of encouraging local people to find solutions to local problems. There have been difficulties in the past where DPPs and CSPs have not always been as joined up as they might have been, although it is very noticeable that, informally, there has been close cross-working in most districts. However, bringing them together as one body will help in the way that Mrs McKevitt has just outlined.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 8 and 9 have been withdrawn. Mr Buchanan is not in his place to ask question 10.

Office of the Police Ombudsman

11. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of how public confidence in the Office of the Police Ombudsman can be restored by the current Police Ombudsman. (AQO 716/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is essential work to be done to improve the operation of the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and to ensure that it is capable of securing widespread public confidence. Swift and robust action in a number of different areas is critical to restoring public confidence in the office. The areas for particular attention are the critical review process and the operation of the confidential unit. I expect there to be a full implementation process, capable of independent validation. That independent validation will be provided by Dr Michael Maguire, the chief inspector of Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland.

As I stated earlier, Al Hutchinson has signalled his desire to leave office by the end of January next year, but he and his senior staff have expressed to me their commitment to implementing the necessary changes to the office. The months that lie ahead will be critical to allowing that process to progress. It is an important step towards the restoration of public confidence, which I believe we all wish to see.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. Does the Minister agree that the sooner Al Hutchinson leaves, the more confidence will be restored in the Office of the Police Ombudsman? Will any procedures be put in place to deal with some of the backlogs? People who did not have confidence in the office might not have gone to the Police Ombudsman, so there could be a big influx of inquiries for the office to deal with when that individual is replaced. Does the Minister agree that the sooner that individual goes, the better?

Mr Ford: When the ombudsman should go is not a matter for me. The Minister of Justice has no role in that. The appointment or possible removal of the ombudsman is solely for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister.

As for the question of a possible backlog of cases, there is no evidence in the figures that I saw recently to suggest that there is any falling off in the number of current cases coming to the ombudsman's office. Therefore, I do not believe that there is likely to be any significant increase

when the new ombudsman is in place next year. However, it will be for the ombudsman's office to manage its workload and to recognise the significant resources that are devoted, and have been devoted in recent times, to the small number of historical cases compared with the resources that are devoted to the ongoing number of normally 3,000 or more cases per year, which has been the trend over the past while.

3.00 pm

Private Members' Business

Planning Enforcement

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly calls on the Minister of the Environment to carry out a review of planning enforcement. — [Mr Wells]*

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I very much welcome the debate. I think that one Member indicated that it was timely and useful to have a political conversation about planning and planning enforcement and that we need to get the balance between both correct. I will explain how I think I am doing a review of so much of planning enforcement, and how I will take forward what I consider to be the review that I am undertaking in that regard.

Mr Wells made a quite remarkable point in his opening remarks, when he said that after 30 years or longer in political life, he had seen absolutely no improvement in planning enforcement. Although I may not use such colourful words, nonetheless it is quite a dramatic statement that in the perception and understanding of a Member of this House with long years of service, there has been absolutely no improvement in enforcement and planning in 30 years. Whatever the accuracy of those words, they are a signpost for concern and unease.

I have a very simple view when it comes to planning enforcement, environmental enforcement, indeed enforcement generally in the North of Ireland: namely, you have to calibrate the penalties against those who are on the wrong side of the law, be hard on those who offend the most, while rewarding those who comply the most. That is the proper equation going forward on enforcement generally: enforce, and rigorously enforce, against those in the wrong, and assist those in compliance or who want to be in compliance. That is the template against which I will judge myself and judge any Minister when it comes to issues of enforcement.

That is why, since becoming Minister, my sense is that — and I say this with due regard to very many good members of staff in the Department — when it comes to enforcement, the number of staff we have dedicated to that function, be

it on the planning or environmental side, is very small and the burden placed on them is very large when you think that over 8,500 complaints on alleged planning failure were recorded in the Department over a couple of years.

So, mindful of the scale of what is reported and the scale of what is needed in reply, it was my sense that there was a lack of confidence in the Department when it came to robust enforcement and that it was part of my responsibility to show ministerial leadership to make it very clear to the staff that, whatever the issues of capacity and confidence, I was determined to see a new enforcement regime put in place to ensure that those on the wrong side of the law were dealt with appropriately.

In my view, a change of culture was required, and I will outline how I am trying to bring that about. At the same time, we need to build up the skills and capacity of those in enforcement in the Department generally so that they can deal with the issues that face them.

A recent planning appeal upset me greatly. At an informal hearing — not a full one — the Department was represented by a planning official who was not responsible for the file. He was faced on the appellant's side by a QC and a planning consultant of some authority, as well as the appellant and his team. That was not equality of arms. I made it clear to the Department that it should not be going into cases, even informal hearings, without the right people and lawyers present to deal with appellants and applicants who, to borrow a phrase, "had the run" of the planning system in certain places over a long period, as some Members, including Peter Weir, John Dallat and Jim Wells, said. Mr Wells then said that the Planning Service "meekly bows" to pressure. I do not know whether that is fully accurate. However, I understand why that might be the appearance of things, because there is an inequality of arms, as demonstrated by that Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) hearing.

Mr Wells: The Member was obviously quite taken aback by my saying that there has been no improvement in the past 30 years. In fact, it has got worse. There are far more cases, far fewer staff for each case and the black hole of the Data Protection Act 1998, which means that none of us knows what on earth is going on. There have been next to no examples in recent years of anything being torn down. Can he give me one single example from the past 30 years where the situation has improved?

Mr Attwood: I cannot fully account for what has happened over the past 30 years, but I can fully account for what has happened over the past six months. That is why I am trying to argue that although it is not an easy process, and your argument about the scale of the problem, the resources and the reply is accurate, I am trying to turn every stone to ensure that every possible measure is implemented in order to redeem the situation.

I will give some examples. On the environmental side — and I hope that this will be duplicated on the planning side — the Lord Chief Justice is working with the Judicial Studies Board and with people at Queen's University to identify how the judiciary can enforce penalties for environmental crime in a more full and rigorous way; that was mentioned by a number of Members during the debate. Indeed, the Lord Chief Justice has written to me to say that when the next Court of Appeal case comes to his attention, new sentencing guidelines for planning enforcement cases brought to the attention of the courts will be laid down. I think that that should also happen on the planning side, so that, at the end of planning enforcement, the courts and judges have demonstrated that they will apply the laws fully when people are in breach of them.

Secondly, John Dallat referred to a summit that I held in Portstewart in October. The purpose of that blight summit was to interrogate local government, the Housing Executive, the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Department of the Environment (DOE) to see what they could do to deal with the issue of blight, where planners have walked off sites, sites have been abandoned unfinished, or where planning conditions have not been complied with in areas such as our coastal towns. Those towns are a critical element in attracting visitors to the North and increasing tourist spend, as well as improving the quality of life for the people who live in those areas.

Newcastle was mentioned earlier, and we know that in Portstewart and Portrush, as well in other towns around the North, coastal or not, there is an issue of planning blight. What can we identify in the Department and local councils to ensure that we bear down on the developers responsible for the state of properties and land in a way that begins to change that?

Thirdly, as people know, I held heritage crime summits in August and October in an effort to identify what more can be done to enforce the law on those individuals or others who are responsible for damaging heritage property or leaving such property exposed. A consequence of that — and I will submit this documentation to the Environment Committee — is that the police have agreed to begin to identify how they will record heritage crime as an element separate from criminal damage, which is what it is currently recorded as, to prevent it getting lost in the figures.

I am looking at what they have in Dublin at the moment. They have the power to fine people substantially when a heritage building or listed building is knocked down. Mr Boylan referred to the increased fines of up to £100,000 for certain breaches, which are already in place here. In Dublin, you have the ability not only to fine but to order the developer who has so damaged the building to replicate it.

In the case of a property being demolished in the South recently, a £1 million fine was imposed and the developer was ordered to rebuild the property in the image of the old building. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) in an effort to ensure that the legal powers, which are significant under POCA, are brought to bear on those who are guilty of heritage crime and organised criminal gangs that are involved in heritage crime, the theft of metals or whatever else.

I might not welcome it, but the fourth example since I became Minister is that I have discovered that I have an obligation, where appropriate, to manage ongoing cases more fully. Let me give you an example. The Planning Appeals Commission made a decision on 26 October, only last week, on an application adjacent to Almac. Let us acknowledge what is in the papers today. Almac is another example of Northern Ireland stepping forward. It has discovered a new means of assessing colon cancer for people at high risk. That is an example of what Northern Ireland is doing well and a business that is doing well. However, it is a business that needs to be protected on planning grounds.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

When the Planning Appeals Commission decided last week to turn down a proposal for a waste facility within feet of the Almac premises, where 1,650 people are employed, I instructed officials to do two things: to draft guidance to inform the life sciences planning policy statement (PPS) in order to try to mitigate the future risk of other planning applications in areas where there are life science premises, including adjacent to Almac in Craigavon; and, in the fullness of time, to escalate that guidance note to an addendum to the relevant PPS in an effort to ensure that those who think that they can make applications anywhere and without giving due regard to or being mindful of the local conditions, including a life science enterprise, are not allowed to do so in the future.

Anna Lo raised an issue in respect of the principle that government enforcement can only happen where it is expedient. I am not happy with how the Department is applying that principle in the live situation. The case of a facility that has been operating in the North of Ireland for the past 10 years has come to my attention in the past number of days. Whatever the employment opportunities that may have been created by that facility, it has no planning permission.

Although there was some contact between the Planning Service and the facility a number of years ago, there has not been any in recent years. When the matter was raised with the Department in June, the officials concerned did not even respond to the public representative who raised it. When they did respond to the matter in a draft letter given to me in the past number of weeks, they did not even apologise for the fact that there had been no response in June, never mind take any action over the past 10 years. That is not proper case management by departmental officials, and I have made it explicitly clear to them that it is not proper management of those issues.

A number of other matters were raised by Simon Hamilton, Jim Wells, Danny Kinahan, Cathal Boylan, and so on and so forth. I will interrogate the Hansard report and reply to each and every one of them.

Mr Wells: Every Member who spoke raised the issue of the black hole caused by the Data Protection Act. We, as public representatives, are not being given the slightest hint of what is going on. Will he address that in his response to Members?

Mr Attwood: I can respond to it now. In every case where an enforcement matter is raised with Planning Service but does not proceed to

enforcement action, the Department is meant to be in contact with those who have raised the case in the first instance. That is meant to be the policy. Therefore, although a very small number of all the cases that are referred to the Department lead to enforcement action, in every other case where the matter gets regularised, where there was no breach or where the breach was minor or technical in nature, the Department is meant to correspond with those who have raised it, be it a politician or a member of the community, and I will ensure that that is the case. Clearly, when cases go for enforcement, you have to be more discreet and judicious given that there is a live legal process, and the Department has to be cautious in what it might say publicly, especially in correspondence.

3.15 pm

However, I welcome the debate and confirm that, further to its 2007 report, a Criminal Justice Inspection report is due within days to review enforcement in the Department, and I will share that with Members and the Committee. Together with the initiatives that I have outlined — and there are many more — that is, in my view, the pathway to dealing with this critical issue that Members have rightly raised.

Mr Easton: Planning enforcement is governed by Planning Policy Statement 9: the enforcement of planning control. The key objectives for planning enforcement are to bring unauthorised development under control; to remedy any undesirable effects of unauthorised development, including, where necessary, the removal or cessation of unacceptable development; and to take legal action, where necessary, against those who ignore or flout planning legislation.

A breach of planning occurs when a development or certain other activities take place without the necessary consent being sought from Planning Service. The Planning (Northern Ireland) Order, as amended, defines a breach of planning control as the carrying out of a development without planning permission or failing to comply with any conditions or limitations subject to which planning permission has been granted. It is not a criminal offence to carry out development without planning permission or to fail to comply with any condition or limitation subject to which planning permission has been granted. However, where an enforcement notice has been served and the offender has not complied with its requirements, he or she is then guilty of an offence.

The following can also be offences: unauthorised demolishment of a building whether it is listed or not; the demolition of a building in a conservation area; failure of an individual to comply with conditions attached to listed buildings consent; non-compliance with conditions attached to conservation areas; unauthorised display of advertisements; or unauthorised works to trees protected by a tree preservation order within a conservation area.

Many of us in the House will know from experience that those rules are rarely adhered to, and, furthermore, I have experience of situations whereby notice has failed to be issued and no action has been taken at all. Sometimes, enforcement is not universally served, and that raises questions about fairness and equity. The rules of enforcement exist for a reason: to prevent harm to the public or private space or to the environment. If an enforcement notice is served, the applicant has the option of applying for retrospective planning permission. If successful, the applicant can then submit amended plans or, alternatively, appeal the decision, which can take a considerable time. Although applicants who fail to comply with planning policy can be subject to fines to discourage unlawful development and to save a court appearance, more needs to be done, and that is why the motion asks the Minister to review the enforcement process.

I also believe that the Minister needs to make the public more aware of permitted development. I know of some cases where individuals have been caught out, and I should add that they are, generally, law-abiding citizens. They have erected a garden shed or greenhouse only to be informed afterwards that they have breached planning policy. That can cause problems for many people, and such people are usually caught out.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree that it is more often the case that the enforcement people go after the easy targets? I know people who have put a window in the wrong gable of a house or put in a window of the wrong size and have been terrorised by enforcement planning officers, yet the big guy who has built a house on the wrong site gets away with it for donkey's years.

Mr Easton: I thank the Member for his question. I totally agree: the small guy always loses out and the big guy always seems to win. That is the perception out there in the public and in the House.

Individuals' obligations in such cases need to be set out clearly and communicated to builders and the like. I know of people who have spent a small fortune on home improvements, believing that they fell within permitted development, only for them to be served with an enforcement notice some time later. It can be as costly to take something down, if not more so, than to put it up in the first place. Many of those people do not have the money for that. I am, of course, referring to individuals, not to large-scale developers or builders.

I will move on to summarise Members' contributions. Mr Wells, who moved the motion, has had 30 years of frustration *[Laughter.]* — over planning enforcement, I might add. He suggested that no one from the planning department was enforcing or policing the planning applications. He also said that 83% of retrospective planning applications were passed, and he claimed that there was something seriously wrong with the entire system. He said that, of the applicants who had applied for retrospective planning permission over all those years, only 13 had their developments pulled down.

Mr Boylan said that it was wrong for listed buildings to be taken down. He was concerned about businesses that had been going for some time, and he wanted some reassurance and clarification from Mr Wells, the mover of the motion, about that. I think that Mr Wells gave that clarification.

Mr Boylan also talked about the four-year rule. However, he said that he supported the motion, although he wanted more clarification.

Mr Kinahan enjoyed Mr Wells's rant. He said that a review needed "the teeth and the tools" to get the system right. He also highlighted three locations in his area — Nutts Corner, Bush Manor and Randalstown — where there were flooding issues. He said that we needed better joined-up government and some common sense in the planning department. However, he supported the motion.

Mr Dallat said that he hoped that planning would go to local government. He said that the current system was appalling and that he hoped that lessons would be learned.

Anna Lo mentioned the recent Planning Bill, which was the largest Bill to come before the Assembly. She also talked about planning going to local councils and wanted consistency in any approach if councils were to gain planning powers. She also supported the motion.

Mr Weir expressed his frustration at planning enforcement and wanted more people to go before the courts for breaches of the planning rules. He felt that the Assembly was not focusing enough on planning enforcement, and he talked about the hurt to residents as a result of some planning applications. He believed that the credibility of the planning department had been damaged over enforcement issues.

Mr Clarke said that the Minister did not have enough resources to deal with enforcement issues. [Interruption.] He talked about a building being torn down in an area of townscape character in Newcastle in his constituency. He believes that the Assembly has a good opportunity to improve things.

Mr Simon Hamilton wanted good sound planning enforcement. He wondered whether there were enough enforcement officers and said that there were 50, although I am not sure whether I am correct in that. He also referred to current fines and asked whether they were high enough. He also talked about the lack of information that is given to elected Members. I hope that the Minister will address that issue.

Mr McGlone said that there were a number of issues about planners' consistency of approach. He talked about court cases running at the same time as planning applications. He did not seem to like that. He said that some developers had removed hedges, walls and buildings that did not belong to them, and he felt that that needed to be addressed. He also felt that people were spinning out the time for the four-year rule.

The Minister, Mr Attwood, is carrying out his review, and he said that he needs to get a balance. He also said that he had a small number of enforcement staff. He believes that there is a lack of confidence among staff, that there needs to be a change of culture and that there is a need to build up skills and capacity among staff. The Minister said that he would

reply to the points raised by Members during the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly calls on the Minister of the Environment to carry out a review of planning enforcement.*

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Speaker: The next item of business in the Order Paper is the motion on the Education and Skills Authority. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. Other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Lunn: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward legislation to establish the Education and Skills Authority within this Assembly session.*

I am pleased once again to bring the question of a single education authority before the House. I will say straight away that in the interests of the smooth and efficient running of the Northern Ireland school system, the need for a single authority by whatever name, be it the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) or some other name, is self-evident. I believe that I have no need to convince at least two parties, namely the SDLP and Sinn Féin, of the validity of the case, although I accept that the DUP has reservations or, at least, lingering doubts. I am not totally clear about the Ulster Unionist Party's position, but I expect to be made so. Perhaps both parties will clarify their remaining sticking points, if indeed there are any.

During the cross-party talks after the May election, the First Minister expressed a view that the establishment of a single authority could be the first major achievement of the new Assembly. He indicated that, from his understanding, the problems of perceived disadvantage to the controlled sector had been dealt with in the period following the collapse of the previous Bill in May 2011, the transferors' rights were now fully respected, and the rights of boards of governors in voluntary grammar schools to make their own decisions and exercise control over their own schools were also protected under the new umbrella of ESA.

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

I am glad that Mr Storey has joined us, and I ask the DUP in particular: if the ESA Bill were brought back to the House now, what clauses would you object to? In the latter stages of our Committee discussions, although there was a list of them, there seemed to be more

suspicion than substance. It seemed to me that DUP members could read a document and see something in it that I could not. However, I look forward to hearing from them.

The following quotation states that we vow to:

> *" rationalise immediately the five Education Boards into one, followed quickly by a single body subsuming the functions, assets and liabilities of Education Boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Staff Commission and Youth Council".*

The document that I am quoting from goes on to say:

> *"preserve the legislative entitlement of the Transferor Representatives' Council to membership of the ownership body for controlled schools".*

That is quite a long quotation, but it comes from a very long document, namely the DUP manifesto for the May elections.

Another lift from a manifesto is that the party:

> *"remains committed to a single Education and Skills Authority".*

It also states that the party is committed to:

> *"ensuring that the positions of Transferor's representatives are protected in any new authority."*

That is from the Ulster Unionist manifesto.

In the 'Belfast Telegraph' on 20 October, Mr McNarry, who is now Deputy Chairperson of the Education Committee, said that he was calling for a single education authority but that the Sinn Féin approach was too bureaucratic. In all the protracted discussions that the Committee had over almost a year, that objection was not raised by UUP members. There was recognition by all parties that the Bill was necessarily complex, given the scale of matters that it had to address, and that the outcome should be a less bureaucratic system that led to the streamlining of delivery and to cost-effectiveness. I do not recall Mr McCrea or Mr McCallister, who were on the Committee at the time, making the argument about over-bureaucracy. My goodness, they had plenty to say, or one of them did. Mr McCrea tended to tease us with regard to what the Ulster Unionist Party's position was.

So, again, I hope that the UUP will make that clear today and that Mr McNarry will speak in the debate. We are not normally in any doubt as to what he thinks, and I am sure that he will be no different today and will tell us what, if any, are the sticking points.

3.30 pm

In the past few days, I have noticed a recurring phrase. I have heard Mr Copeland and Mr Nesbitt say:

> *"That was then; this is now".*

That seems to be a catchphrase for the time being, but it also seems to indicate a willingness to move from a previous position on to new ground. Therefore, let us hear the up-to-date position of UUP Members and whether they will support a single authority and be prepared to argue the detail in Committee and in the Assembly.

I mean no offence to his predecessor, but the Minister has shone a different light on various aspects of the education system. He has also shown a willingness to bring a suitable Bill before the House, provided that there is sufficient political agreement to ensure its passage. I hope that that is a reasonable summary of the Minister's position. In answer to questioning from Conall McDevitt and me about the need for political agreement, the Minister told the Committee for Education:

> *"I have never stopped the conversation. I can assure you that no representative who wants to talk to me about the ESA has been turned away from my door."*

That actually sounds quite similar to Caitríona Ruane's mantra, which was often repeated in the House and asked us to join with her, as the issue was all about the children. Both are invitations to open a discussion, but one of the questions that I ask today is: who should instigate that discussion and in what format should it be? I suggest that it is up to the Minister to open the discussion with all parties on this most important issue.

During the previous Assembly, four-party talks were held on educational issues. Sadly, those talks did not include Sinn Féin, but that was its decision. Those talks produced a useful portfolio of advice, and, perhaps more significantly, they proved that there was a willingness to engage on issues and in frank discussions away from the strictures of the Assembly and the Committee. I put it to the Minister today that, instead of waiting for parties to knock his door, he should proactively

lead a five-party discussion to tease out the remaining problems, if they exist, to enable the Department to frame legislation that is acceptable to everyone.

I also challenge the other parties, particularly the DUP, to make the commitment that, if a reasonable level of agreement is evidenced, they will not hide behind a petition of concern when the time comes for debate. Likewise — I cannot believe that this could happen again — I would hope that progress would not be blocked at Executive level, as happened the last time, when the Bill reached the Order Paper and was pulled at the last minute.

In virtually every aspect of its operation, our education system is badly in need of reform. The boards, through no fault of their own, are in disarray, and the estate is in a very poor state and is crumbling around us. We all know the issues: 85,000 empty desks; ongoing problems with selection, with the maintained sector doing its own thing in post-primary review; nursery and early years problems; and perceived and real underachievement among Protestant boys or, perhaps more realistically, working-class children in difficult areas. Those issues also include a budget that is stretched to breaking point by the massive inefficiency in how we run the system and, depending on how you count the numbers, an education system that involves at least 15 operating bodies. Does anyone seriously think that, if we were to design an education system now to fit the needs of a population of 1·6 million people, it would look anything like what we have? Does anyone still believe that we would not benefit in cost, efficiency and the education of our children with the installation of a single body — call it ESA or whatever you like — that could work with the best of what we have and reform or discard the rest?

I pay tribute to the head teachers and staff in our schools who continue to do their best for their pupils, sometimes in very trying circumstances. I also pay tribute to the boards that are operating in almost a vacuum, with so many staff acting up and working under exceptional financial pressures. Those staff are doing their very best, as everybody is, but we need root-and-branch reform. That cannot be realised by tinkering with existing systems. We need an overarching structure at the very top with the authority and expertise to take strategic decisions and drive efficiency through the system.

Much has been made of the cost of ESA and the implementation team to date, but, in the overall scheme of things, that expense will have been worthwhile and that work will not have been wasted if we can now agree to move forward. It was calculated that ESA would save £80 million in the first four years of its operation, and experts have calculated that the division in our society produces waste of £300 million in the education system. What could be achieved by a resolute Department working with a single education authority that has the authority to take the necessary decisions? The possibility is there, and it is in our hands. I ask Members to join me and the Minister, and let us try to get the show on the road. I, therefore, ask the Assembly to support the motion, other parties to spell out their position and the Minister to accept the motion and take on board the suggestions made. I look forward to his response.

Mr Storey: I speak on the motion with a sense of déjà vu because we have been here so many times in the past. However, I think that this occasion differs from previous debates. I do not want to go over the past with any great glee or enjoyment, but the environment in which the education debate is now conducted is more conducive to dealing with the issues in a constructive and meaningful way. That is not to say that there are no issues or that there are not still ideological differences between parties. However, there are things that we must set clearly on the record in this debate.

First, where did ESA come from? Let us be very clear: ESA was not formulated in Connolly House, nor did it come from the headquarters of the DUP. It came out of the Department, on the back of a damning assessment by the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons of the spend — or misspend — of £40 million on numeracy and literacy. I believe that the Department always intended to remove bureaucracy and reduce the large number of organisations to which the Member referred in his opening comments, so that there would be a more streamlined and efficient system. The cynic in me says that there were other reasons why the Department may have wanted that. However, when the Bill was brought to light, with 55 clauses and seven schedules, it was abundantly clear that the Department had opened a Pandora's box and could not satisfy all the expectations and demands nor allay all the concerns and fears that existed among a variety of organisations. That led us to a situation in

which there were key, fundamental problems with the Bill. I am glad that the Member referred to DUP manifestos. He is wiser than I am, in that he reads and digests such documents before coming to the House.

I want to spell out that one of the fundamental problems or deficiencies in the Bill was with regard to the transferors and the controlled sector. My party has made its position clear, for which, I trust, I take some responsibility. I was educated in the controlled sector. I did not have a grammar school education, nor did I go to university. However, I valued greatly what the controlled sector did for me as a young person by giving me an education. The Bill was going to take away the legislative rights of a particular section of the community, and that was a fundamental problem with it. I believe that, as a result of the discussion and dialogue held over the past number of weeks and months, progress can be made on that issue and it can be resolved.

Ownership is also an issue. Remember that the previous Bill wanted to create a holding body for the controlled sector — the establishment of another body, when the Bill's original purpose and intent was to remove bodies. Therefore, why was there a need for a holding body? I think that the merit of that has been dispensed with. There was the two-Bill approach. We had two Bills as opposed to one.

The devil was always going to be in the detail. I have said repeatedly that we need to have a single authority, but a single authority based on the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, which gives simplicity, clarity and direction to the education system in Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]* Does the Member want me to give way?

Mr Lunn: That will give you an extra minute. Does the Member now agree with his party leader, who said at the cross-party talks after the election that he could not see any obstacle to this process moving forward?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Storey: Thank you.

Far from it, and far be it from me to be found to oppose my party leader. My party leader and I discussed the issue over the summer and on many occasions in the past, so he is well versed on the issues. We are clearly in the position, made clear in our manifesto, of supporting the principle of a single authority for education.

The other issue in the second Bill that we wanted to dispense with was the establishment of an education advisory forum. With the greatest of respect, we do not need a civic forum for education. Debates on education —

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

Mr Storey: Debates on education must take place in the House, with the Minister, the Education Committee and other Assembly Members present, not in an expensive talking shop outside.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíochta a thabhairt don rún. I support the motion.

For some time, there has been consensus on the need for modernisation and reform in the administration of education. The need for it, as a result of potential cost savings, has been well documented by Members who have spoken and by many other people over years past. Sinn Féin has supported ESA as a replacement for the local education and library boards to bring efficiencies into local education. We have sought political support for such a move for some time, and I hope that the debate will add impetus to those discussions.

Implementing ESA would bring savings of up to £20 million each year. At a time of extensive cuts to the education budget, we must look at ways of saving administration costs to protect front line services. However, we also need to acknowledge the potential improvements that can be made to our education system if a single organisation were charged with delivering education. The education of our children is the most important factor in advancing the education agenda, and rationalising the regional boards into one authority makes perfect sense. Savings would be made through better planning, better management of the schools estate and better co-operation across existing board areas.

Currently, the library boards and CCMS have been tasked by the Education Minister to carry out a viability audit of our schools estate. The scenario would be much better if a single organisation could take forward such an important piece of work to ensure that

proper discussions take place and no existing vested interests or agendas are protected. Unfortunately, owing to a delay in getting political consensus, we have not yet reached that position.

We in the House need to take charge of the scenario. We need to send a message that we are here to protect and deliver public services as best we can and that politics can work for people here. We often see politicians fail to deliver change because they think that they will, in some way, leave their own wee community or a section of society behind. We need to wake up and realise that the community and society are ahead of us in that regard. There is overwhelming consensus among the public that education reform needs to happen and that the Education and Skills Authority needs to be set up. We must move beyond discussions about establishing ESA and continue to focus on improving how we deliver education to our children and young people.

Every year, 4,000 young people leave school without the most basic literacy and numeracy skills. There are children in our society who manage to make it the whole way through the education system with dyslexia or dyspraxia without ever being diagnosed or receiving any help.

3.45 pm

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. We need to be careful not to overplay the point about raising standards. The creation of a new administrative system is not the only way to raise standards. It may be helpful in doing so, but remember that the boards already have a responsibility to do that. So we just need to be careful not to put all our eggs in one basket.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I hear what he is saying. I am not going to stand here and quote departmental policies, because I know how much he detests that practice. He will, however, agree with me that setting a standard across the whole of the North will help to improve standards and to tackle inefficiencies in certain areas. Those are the areas that we need to focus on. I am confident and hopeful that the Minister of Education will continue to work in that regard to put the needs of our children and young people first and to put in place a modern education system. Sinn Féin will support the motion, and it is calling on the other parties to support it too in order to improve our ability to deliver first-class education to all our children.

Mr McNarry: The proposal is not difficult to support. However, the real question that the motion provokes is this: just how far has the political debate matured towards agreement? The education structure requires urgent reform before any ESA proposals are legislated for. By all means, bring forward legislation. Heaven knows this place could more easily justify its existence by doing what it was set up to do: legislating. However, let us not rush or give the impression that all the Minister needs to do is to bring forward an ESA potion and all will then be well with education. That is clearly not the case, and it will not be the case until many issues are resolved.

The Minister needs to engage properly with parties to reach consensus on the ESA. As we know, education is a sensitive issue that requires consensus. In October, the Minister referred to Members' shyness when talking about the Programme for Government. Since that is demonstrably not the case — shyness is not a problem, and there is no Programme for Government — I suggest that the Minister urgently engage in round-table talks on education as soon as he feels that that is appropriate. Events have overtaken him. There is already a live debate about whether we can continue with the current outdated model of four separate education sectors or whether education would be better served by a "whole of Northern Ireland" community approach within a new single service that is united by a shared education experience under one common authority. The recent remarks referred to —

Mr Storey: I appreciate the Member giving way. Does he agree that one of the issues that needs to be addressed, irrespective of what happens with the ESA, is the Minister's budget profile? Irrespective of whether we have one, two or 10 boards, if the aggregate schools budget continues as it is, more teachers will be made redundant. I have raised that issue with the Minister to find out how we will deal with what is a major problem, irrespective of whether we have a single authority.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Member for his point, which is relevant and which we will no doubt continue to return to in Committee.

I refer to the First Minister's recent remarks on the subject, which caused a reaction at the time with some pundits, who asked, "What is he really up to?". I, for one, do not believe that the First Minister is up to anything. He seems to be stating the obvious. His sentiments echo those voiced by me over five years ago and reflect what many people feel today.

The budget has been mentioned. Despite the growing financial pressures on education, there is scope for new and visionary opportunities that lie principally in the creation of a single streamlined education service. However, the ESA model that we are being offered is flawed, and it has been pointed out to be just that. Unfortunately, the Minister is wrestling with a monster that his predecessor created. Some £12 million has already been and continues to be spent to maintain the ESA shadow organisation. Some people in it seem to imagine that all that the Minister needs to do is to press the legislative button and another bureaucratic empire will be created. That nonsense serves only to bring the House into disrepute with the public. Let the Minister explain how such a sham can continue. If legislation is not forthcoming and the shadow organisation has completed the remit, I ask the Minister to justify its continuance.

We can and we know that we can do better. We can use the opportunity to ensure that the ESA actually works for education and does not become another self-satisfied unaccountable bureaucracy, which many of us fear the present model will become. Perhaps, the Minister will share with us his timetable for the introduction of legislation. Perhaps, he will acknowledge that the expenditure of millions of pounds has given rise to an atmosphere of self-righteousness among some luminary designates in the ESA shadow unit. Perhaps, he will tell the House that his intention for the ESA is that it will facilitate efficiencies, redirect funding from administration to front line teaching services and ensure that the position of the transferors' representatives is protected and fully recognised in his proposed legislation for the ESA.

I thank the sponsors for tabling the motion, if only for the purpose of sparking the debate and, I am sure, in the hope that they would provoke some headway towards a conclusion. How close we are to an acceptable outcome may be beyond our reach today, but, surely, it is not beyond our competency to get there as soon as possible.

Mr McDevitt: With the greatest respect to the mover of the motion, I say that it is hard to get excited about the debate. The Assembly has been back for six months since the election. Not one piece of legislation has been brought to the Floor of the House. The points that are being made should be debated through a Bill, with the Bill in front of us. Instead, we are having talks about talks about possibly doing something when the talks are over and having more talks about maybe thinking about introducing a Bill by next year. If I were one of the many people who have given their career to one of the education and library boards, lived with the shadow of uncertainty and watched morale collapse all around them and I had plugged into the internet to watch today's debate, I would just say, "What is the point? Is this what we vote for? Is this what it has come down to?". It really is a shocking indictment of us all.

We have a situation in which, when all of us went to the people seven months ago, the 'Belfast Telegraph' was able to write the following lines:

> *"Northern Ireland's main political parties have vowed to put education at the heart of the Assembly during the next four years. Alliance, DUP, SDLP, Sinn Fein and UUP have all made pledges to progress our education system in their 2011 Assembly manifestos."*

That was on 25 April 2011. Six days later, we went to the polls. We all seem to have forgotten that we made that pledge. If we have not forgotten that we made that pledge, where is the action on it? When will we see some action on it? Do we write those things just, frankly, to make ourselves look like absolute eejits in the eyes of our population?

Mr McNarry: I hear what the Member is saying. Perhaps, some of that criticism is deserved. Can he tell me what his party's Minister is doing at the Executive on the issue?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: I am not a member of the Executive. I understand that my party's Minister is exercised by the issue. When the draft Programme for Government was being debated

at the Executive, the Minister highlighted the fact that there was not a single commitment to one piece of legislation in it. I can tell you as a matter of fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the benefit of Mr McNarry and colleagues, that, when the SDLP responded to the draft Programme for Government, that issue was in the third paragraph of our response. The Assembly really needs to start to build some sort of resolve in the Chamber that what is needed is not more discussion about the ESA but legislation on the ESA that we can debate.

We know the cost to date. One teachers' union tells us that it has cost us potentially 400 teachers. As I said, we know that it is utterly destroying staff morale. It is a matter of fact that it is undermining public confidence in our education system. Some parents and other people who know a lot more about this than I do are beginning to think that it could damage children's futures. As far as I can see, all we are proposing to do is to take a pretty awful organogram with 15 unrelated bodies and move them into five to rationalise the back office, to save a few quid, to provide a bit of strategic direction and to bring more focus to education. However, the question still remains: why can we not debate the legislation that will make that possible?

As you will know, Mr Deputy Speaker, we had our party conference at the weekend. There was a bit of light-hearted entertainment on Saturday night and a bit of a running joke — Mr Bradley will remember this — about stuff that Martin McGuinness might have said during his career. It was very interesting, and it was pointed out that, if he left the IRA in 1974, when certain things happened in 1982 that was only really eight years after he left the IRA. We had an election and made all those commitments about education in April 2011, and, in October 2011, which was five months after the election, our First Minister told us on the record that he would save £400 million from the Northern Ireland Executive through greater efficiencies. He went on to say:

> *"long-awaited plans to merge our five education boards into one body, the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), are now also 'in the final stages'."*

If they are in the final stages, can the Minister tell us how many meetings he has had with the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the issue? Can he tell us whether they have a Bill, and, if so, when will it come to us? If they do not have a Bill, does he have a Bill? If so, when will that Bill come to us? Can we please come back very soon to turn this debate about a debate into a debate about legislation?

Mr Givan: I want to build on some of the points that my colleague Mr Storey has already made. He outlined a number of the problems that we had with the previous Bill and some of the issues around which we are having clarity sought and given in order for this matter to progress. It is right to say that the environment has changed and positive discussion is taking place. It is important that we get it right. I know that some Members can get very impatient, but we need to get it right.

Mr McDevitt: Talk about slow learners.

Mr Givan: The Member opposite really needs to learn about belittling people. I heard the comment about slow learners. Yesterday, he belittled people and made a fool of himself, and, again, he is trying to make a fool of himself. He would do better to be a little calmer and to listen to what other people have to say. I know that he has a tendency to run for the cheap headline and will stoop into any gutter to get it, but maybe the Member should have a little more patience and take on board the commentary that comes from other people.

Let us get this right. That is what is important in all of this, and then the legislation can come forward. I note the comments asking where the legislation is, but some Members seem to forget that their Ministers are also in the Executive. Where is their legislation? Indeed, the Minister from the party opposite tried to withdraw a planning policy statement that would help to grow our economy; so, rather than producing legislation and planning policy statements, they are withdrawing them. Therefore, let us put the record right: either you are in the Executive or you are out of it, and it is time that the SDLP made up its mind. Let us put the lights on in that party and get it right. Either you are in it or you are out of it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please return to the motion.

Mr Givan: Another issue that we have to seek clarity on relates to boards of governors. I declare an interest as a member of the board of governors of two schools. We want to make sure that we get right the way in which those boards are drawn and how the ESA would perform that role.

There was an issue before about community governors. What is important to us is that we are able to draw a board of governors that is reflective of the community and that transferors have their rights protected and represented on those boards of governors.

4.00 pm

When ESA gets established, it has to be on the basis of equality. The Catholic maintained sector and the controlled sector must be treated equally and all their rights must be protected. They have a very important role to play. They have invested a considerable amount of effort, over decades, in the education system, and we should pay tribute to the work that they have done. It is important that, whenever it is taken forward, the controlled sector, CCMS and the different faith groups that have played a vital role in education have those rights protected. We want to ensure that that is the case. There is also the employment issue — becoming a single employer for all the different staff that are employed in our schools and throughout the education establishments. Getting clarity on that particular issue will help us to move forward.

The other reason why establishing ESA as soon as possible would be very helpful, particularly for those of us who represent the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, is to bring some semblance of democratic accountability to the education system in the area governed by that education board. As I said before, it is inexcusable that, six years since its suspension, we still have commissioners running that education board. Only today, I got a letter from the Education Minister stating that determining whether there should be a reconstitution of the South Eastern Education and Library Board will be dependent on an assessment being made when ESA is established.

Bringing ESA forward and getting it right would allow the South Eastern Education and Library Board to get a better system in place for schools. The reason why it was suspended and the purpose of bringing in the commissioners to perform have long passed being a justification for why that happened in the first place. Again, I appeal to the current Minister to look at the issue of the commissioners and of when ESA is going to be brought forward, because that board area needs to have proper accountability and democratic representation.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. Sinn Féin supports the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, and has supported it from the minute that Sinn Féin took office in 2007 under Caitríona Ruane. The current Minister fully supports and is proactive on the establishment of ESA.

ESA makes economic sense during these tough times. We must ensure that we have effective organisations administrating education. ESA is a major tool that will ensure consistency of approach across all the areas, such as special needs. We need to ensure that all children and young people have access to the highest standards and qualifications. Why should we spend money on administrating nine organisations, nine chief executives, human resource managers and finance managers? We would do much better to use those resources for our teachers, classrooms, classroom assistants and pupils. The sooner we have ESA, the better for everyone.

Sinn Féin remains committed to the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. Some of the Members who spoke previously mentioned children leaving school without any level of qualification. We have always said here in the House that children should remain at the heart of our education system. We can go a step further on that, and I urge all those who are in doubt to seize this opportunity to support the Minister in bringing forward the legislation.

It is encouraging here today that we have a positive vein and there are no real fundamental differences. We have had a positive discussion this afternoon, and I thank the proposer and the other Members for bringing the motion to the House. People and educationalists in the sector want to move forward, so let us have less of the talking and more of the action on this issue.

Mrs Hale: As a member of the Education Committee, I support the motion.

This issue dominated the headlines and the work of the Assembly in the previous mandate and, unfortunately, it continues to do so. We need to see progress on the issue, but it requires the input and the willingness of the Education Minister to work with the parties around the table.

The authority established by the previous Education Minister did not reflect that which was

proposed in the review of public administration framework. RPA was about streamlining services, including education, and generating savings. Why, for example, is the word "skills" included in the name of the body? Is there a political point implied in the use of that word? Not all schools in Northern Ireland would agree with that term, as many schools focus on educational and academic achievement. Furthermore, if the body is about streamlining education, what assurances are there that money that will be saved in the attempt to reduce bureaucracy will go back into front line services? The latest figures, taking us up to August 2011, as Mr McNarry said, amount to £12 million, and that cost continues to rise. It is sad to think that that money could not have been spent on other things. The staff of Dromore Central Primary School and Dromore High School and the pupils of those schools and their parents could think of 12 million other uses for that money.

In any liberal democracy, when a Bill is put before the relevant Parliament and falls, it does not become law. In the case of the Education Bill, consensus was not achieved and the Bill was stopped in its tracks. Instead, the then Minister decided to force the issue in the absence of consensus and of ensuring the proper and correct process associated with any liberal democracy. As part of any liberal democracy, people elect other people to represent them and their views. The previous Minister, therefore, not only ignored the views of the Members of this House, but those of the people of Northern Ireland.

I am keen to see that the issue is resolved, as, I am sure, we all are. Unfortunately, we are left in a position whereby ESA exists in a transitional form. In May this year, as Mr McDevitt reminded us, the people went to the polls. My party's slogan was, "Let's keep Northern Ireland moving forward". My party successfully increased its membership here, with me as the fourth menu — Member — for the DUP in Lagan Valley.

Mr Givan: Very tasty.

Mrs Hale: Very tasty. *[Laughter.]* Well, I do not make those comments to boast about my party's fortunes in the May election, but to say that a majority of people in Northern Ireland want to see progress on the issue in question. I would like to see that happen because, as Michaela reminded us, children are at the heart of it.

Mrs Dobson: I support the motion and thank the proposer for bringing it to the House.

In answer to a question submitted by my colleague Mr Basil McCrea last month, the subject of which was raised again today by my colleague Mr McNarry, the Department of Education revealed that the costs of the preparation of ESA, up to the end of August 2011, have totalled some £12·1 million. That is a startling amount of money for the Executive to waste on an organisation that does not officially exist.

Were Members to visit the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team (ESAIT) website, they would find that there is only a single piece of news for this year, concerning the publication of the convergence delivery plan in January 2011. That plan stated that some £13 million of efficiencies in the previous financial year were dependent on the establishment of ESA. As we now know, £12·1 million was spent with little achieved in the way of efficiencies. There have been some notable successes, such as the implementation of a common ICT platform and the design of an organisational structure. Those successes prove that the principles of the establishment of ESA are sound and deliver efficiencies, but it has been six years since RPA was first announced and three years since ESA was first discussed and, still, we are in stalemate.

I am sure that many Members share my concerns about the future role of the Churches in ESA through the transferors' representatives. Currently, some 1,900 nominees from the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Ireland serve as governors in our primary and secondary schools. Ten members nominated by the Churches serve each of the education and library boards. Since 1921, transferors' representatives have made and continue to make valuable contributions to our education system, based on the ethos of the Christian faith. As it is clear that Christianity continues to be our most widely held religious belief and that parents seek to have their children educated in schools in the context of the Christian faith, we must ensure that the positive and historical involvement of the Churches is maintained through the establishment of ESA. I ask the Minister to clarify his position on their future involvement.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not know whether she has had any discussions with the transferors since she was elected, but does she not accept, from me, at least, that the transferors are largely satisfied with the situation that they have been offered?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Dobson: Thank you. No, I do not agree with your comments.

We must set out our goals towards delivering better value for money in our education system while maintaining the quality of service for our schoolchildren throughout the transitional period in the delivery of education and support services. In the present economic climate, the case for a single education and skills authority has never been stronger. The benefits far outweigh any reservations, but the answer is not to continue with this expensive, protracted and counterproductive stalemate. We owe it to the present and next generation of our schoolchildren to look towards the future of education in Northern Ireland.

I acknowledge that the Minister has a difficult balancing act to perform. Uncertainty and inactivity have led to staff morale throughout the sector falling to a low ebb. He must balance the needs of those staff and the future aspirations of our young children during the coming rationalisation of the school system. Those are tough decisions, and they cannot be taken without the input of religious and political stakeholders. Their influence must be acknowledged and protected.

We can be in little doubt that ESA will, once again, appear in the Programme for Government. This time, the Executive must not fail to deliver on their promises. I urge the Minister to clarify the future role of the Churches and to break the present stalemate and realise the goals of pupils, parents and teachers across Northern Ireland by delivering on this important improvement issue.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún tábhachtach seo ar an údarás oideachais agus scileanna.

I support the motion. Mr Storey said that this debate was a bit like déjà vu. I will quote the person who said that it is a bit like "déjà vu all over again", because we seem to have been through it before. We have scrutinised the Bill, and now we are back here debating it again.

Surely, the need for a single education body has been self-evident for some time. It is clear from party manifestos that the rationalisation of the proliferation of education bodies is agreed on by all parties in the House. The original aim of ESA was to streamline education services and policies across the North, and in doing so, to reduce the bureaucratic burden and its associated costs. As an afterthought, it was proposed that ESA would have a role in raising standards by implementing departmental policy. However, that was not the original function. The original estimate of savings was something in the region of £20 million per annum. Instead of making those savings, we have expended £12 million in preparing for the establishment of ESA, which still has not been set up.

Mr Storey: It is not often that I defend the previous Minister or this Bill, but, for clarity, the issue of raising standards was not an afterthought; it is in clause 4 on the second page of the Bill. Maybe he needs to read this document, even though it is probably out of date.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for his intervention. In the pre-Bill days, when ESA was originally discussed, there was no mention whatsoever of raising standards; the key function of ESA was to reduce costs. Although he may be correct about the Bill, he is incorrect about the pre-Bill days.

4.15 pm

We have depopulated the education and library boards of staff in preparation for the arrival of ESA and, to date, it has not arrived. It is a bit like waiting for Godot, and, in the meantime, we have neither one thing nor the other. On the one hand, the effectiveness of the boards has been reduced to the point where they are straining to provide a service with reduced staff numbers and fewer resources, and, on the other hand, ESA has not been established. It is costing us rather than saving for us.

The motion calls for legislation to be introduced to establish ESA before the end of this Assembly session, and that may be indeed be possible. An amount of work was done on the first Education

Bill, which allowed for the setting up of ESA, but that Bill would require quite an amount of redrafting to include the resolution of outstanding issues. I wonder whether the Minister has given any thought to amending the Education and Libraries Order 1986, which may provide a way in which to expedite matters and to accelerate the establishment of a single body.

There is a need to ensure that examinations remain apart from ESA so that there is no suggestion that the independence of examinations here is in any way compromised. Quite frankly, I find it difficult to believe that the Minister has not yet met face to face with the chief executives of the education and library boards to discuss the establishment of ESA. I believe that they are eager to meet him. Surely those people are the most experienced educational administrators that we have, and the Minister should be seeking their views and using their experience to move things forward. I would like the Minister to give us an undertaking that he will indeed engage with the chief executives in a dedicated meeting on the issue without any further delay.

We cannot afford any further delay. We need the single education body to ensure that strategic planning across a range of education issues is implemented. Without it, we have a dysfunctional system that is in danger of pulling in different directions. The Minister needs to show leadership to bring the matter to a head without further delay. Parents, pupils, teachers and staff in the education organisation deserve that, and let us give it to them. A LeasCheann Comhairle, tacaím leis an rún. I support the motion.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis freagairt ar an rún. D'éist mé go cúramach leis an díospóireacht agus tabharfaidh mé freagra ar an oiread ceisteanna a ardaíodh agus is féidir liom. Scríobhfaidh mé, ar ndóigh, chuig Comhaltaí ar bith nach bhfreagraím a gceisteanna inniu.

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion. I have listened carefully to the debate, and I shall respond to as many of the issues that were raised as possible. I will write to the Members involved on any issues that I do not respond to directly.

I remind Members of the two main reasons why we need an education and skills authority. First, our education system matters. It secures the education and development of our children, spends over £2 billion of public money every year and holds the second largest public service budget. It employs more than 50,000 staff, and education embraces children and young people from birth to the age of 19. It provides services as diverse as Sure Start, schools and youth clubs. We cannot disagree that a service as valuable and important as education needs modern, effective administration arrangements.

Secondly, education services need to change fundamentally. We need to change how we plan schools and how we build them, change how schools are governed and managed, and change how we challenge schools to raise standards and how we hold them to account. We rightly celebrate all that is good in our education system, the educational excellence of those who work in it and the exam results of the top performers. However, in praising what is good, let us not overlook the urgent need for improvement. Our education system fails to equip over 40% of children with the qualifications needed for employment or higher education.

That is unacceptable. It damages the life chances of young people, it blights communities and it throttles our economy. Mr Bradley said — it may have been an afterthought, but it was a very good one — that the ESA Bill should include provision for raising standards as a central component of that body.

International evidence from studies such as PISA — the programme for international student assessment — shows that it is clear that we are falling behind many other countries. That matters to education and the economy because we are falling behind our economic competitors. If we want to attract investment to rebalance the economy, we must compete with highly skilled economies, and effective education is key to that. I believe that the educational case for change is unanswerable. The financial case is just as strong. Establishing ESA would save £20 million a year in administration. That sum has already been removed from the education budget, so we are continuing to prop up unnecessary bureaucracy that we no longer have the money to pay for.

The budget was mentioned on several occasions by Members during the debate. It is clear that the Department of Education faces a very difficult budget. I am looking at the aggregated

schools budget to see whether we can re-profile it, but I am robbing Peter to pay Paul. There is no new money in the system. We have to look at efficiencies across the system, and one of the clear areas to look for efficiencies in is administration.

The subject of ESAIT has been raised, as have questions about why it is in place. It is in place because the Programme for Government stated that ESA would be established. Therefore, it would be rather foolish of any Department not to have the necessary plans in place. However, ESAIT cannot remain in place for ever. The Executive, the Assembly and we politicians have to make a decision as to whether we are going to live up to that commitment in the Programme for Government and deliver ESA. If we cannot live up to that Programme for Government commitment, ESAIT will no longer exist.

Establishing ESA would bring a step change in delivering the vision of supporting schools and meeting challenges. All public services are facing difficult circumstances, with tough decisions to be made. In the cases of libraries and health and social services, the Assembly has acted decisively to bring about fundamental reform and to equip those services with modern arrangements. By contrast, education is stuck with arrangements that are no longer fit for purpose. Those arrangements tie up resources in unnecessary bureaucracy and fail to deliver equality, with services depending on where someone lives, not on what they need. Those arrangements struggle to adapt to the changing needs of learners.

It is also clear that the existing organisations are strained to breaking point, despite the best efforts of those who work in them. At this point, I would like to address Mr Bradley's comment that I have not met the chief executives. I have met the chief executives. The democratic authority in an education board, however, lies with the chair, not the chief executive, just as the democratic authority in the Department of Education lies with the Minister, not the permanent secretary. The chief executive officer of any organisation is the accounting officer; the democratic authority in an organisation lies with the elected chair. That is who I, as a democratically elected representative, quite correctly deal with. That in no way undermines the experience, authority or commitment of the chief executives in our education boards, who carry out great work across our system.

There are factors in various sectors that vary. Take, for example, the autonomy of schools to run day-to-day affairs. That is rightly prized by many, but it varies from sector to sector for no educational reason. Some schools enjoy great freedom to innovate, while others are not even free to choose their own senior teachers. I believe that accountable autonomy should be available to all schools on the basis of need and ability and not be limited to some on the basis of historical custom and practice. The case for reform is unanswerable. Change is needed now.

The ESA debate often focuses on who will control the body, what its powers might be and how it will relate to other stakeholders and institutions. Those are all important questions but they are not the right starting point. We all want to see successful schools, so the first and most important question should be: how do we design an ESA to foster success? Some have suggested that a single type of school is the answer. I profoundly disagree. Our education system is richly diverse, reflecting the choices made by learners, parents, teachers and governors. No one type of school has a monopoly on success, and I have seen outstanding, successful schools in every sector, as well as schools that need to improve. However, successful schools in every sector tend to have certain things in common: high quality teaching in the classroom; high quality leadership in the management team and in the boardroom; accountability to the communities that they serve; an ethos that learners, pupils, staff and governors support; and the ability and support to manage their own day-to-day affairs.

ESA should be designed to promote and support those features in every school. Its role should encompass better planning and development of the education workforce; better support and development for school governors and managers; better planning of the education estate; promoting greater sharing and co-operation across all school sectors and types; and improving performance, holding schools to account and challenging them where necessary.

Some fear that ESA will be too big and risks turning into an unaccountable, domineering quango. Let me assure Members that that will not be the case. Education, perhaps more than any specific public service, is local. It is delivered by over 1,000 schools, 200 early years providers and 2,000 youth organisations. Education can call on over 10,000 school

governors and 20,000 youth workers, all serving in a voluntary capacity. What other public service is so firmly rooted in the communities that it serves?

ESA will not change that, nor should it. ESA will not be a remote overlord but an accessible, supporting, critical friend. It will be a single system to serve a diversity of schools. ESA will preserve the strength of all schools. It will focus on the interests of learners and teachers rather than on institutions. It should be designed and implemented with the appropriate functions and powers and with governance arrangements founded on local democratic accountability.

We often hear of the interests and concerns of sectors and other education stakeholders over ESA, in particular those of the transferors. A number of Members raised the issue of the transferors. I can assure the House today that the concerns raised by the transferors have been taken on board and they can and will be resolved. In fact, those assurances were given during the previous mandate. The transferors' issue will be resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Mr B McCrea: That is news to us. We — that is to say, the Minister and I — had discussions at Stormont Castle, where we were looking at how we might resolve the issue of the transferors. We are told that it will be resolved satisfactorily, but that is not the case. They are not happy. They are not satisfied, and until the situation is resolved, it is difficult to see how we can move forward. Will the Minister clarify whether things have changed since our discussions?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not think that megaphone diplomacy will be helpful in this instance. I assure you that your recollection of views is not the same as what I recall. If there are any outstanding issues, they should be communicated to me, and we will see what we can do to resolve them.

As with any change to a system or a function, you will not be able to deal with every concern raised by whatever sector comes to you, nor should I, as Minister, be expected to do so. I have to take a collective view on all the matters, and I intend to do that.

Why has no legislation been brought to the House today? Why are we debating a motion? I feel that it is only right and proper that we introduce legislation that has the best chance of going through the Chamber. We do not need another false dawn with ESA. To do that again would be totally unfair to the staff and senior management who are working in the boards and the rest of our education service. It has been frustrating and slow, but I do believe that we are making progress.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Just give me one moment.

I am of the view that we will be able to introduce legislation in the near future that will satisfy the needs of our education service and the core needs of reform in education and will deliver a more modern education service.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Minister for giving way. What is the Minister's best prediction, at this time, for the establishment of ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: The motion calls for legislation to be brought forward within this session, and I believe that that can be achieved. Since coming into office, I have been in discussions with the DUP. Mr McNarry from the Ulster Unionist Party, an Education Committee member, has recently corresponded with me, seeking to meet me on this and a wide range of education matters, and I have agreed to do that. The Alliance Party tabled the motion. However, not a single line have I had from the SDLP in respect of this matter.

I have been challenged in the Education Committee by the SDLP to start dialogue and talks. I have been challenged today in the Chamber to introduce legislation, and that party has damned the Executive because there is no legislation coming forward. I am a member of the Executive. I do not recall the conversations that the Member outlined today about concerns raised by certain Ministers at Executive meetings. I do not recall them.

I know that the Executive have agreed that legislation on RPA and the councils should be brought forward. However, if the Member is so keen on legislation, when will we see the legislation on those matters?

4.30 pm

It is all well and good for Members to come into the Chamber to make bold and strong statements that will, no doubt, be carried on the evening news and in tomorrow morning's newspapers. However, behind the scenes —

Mr McDevitt: When?

Mr D Bradley: Answer his question.

Mr O'Dowd: I have been in office for the past six months, and not one SDLP Member has knocked my office door to ask to speak to me about this or any other education matter. So, when they talk about the Assembly not working, perhaps they need to take a closer look at themselves and ask whether they are working.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate the Minister's giving way. He may have needed to catch his breath there.

When I raised this question at the Education Committee, the Minister told me that the only place he wanted to debate ESA was at the Education Committee and that he did not want any side negotiations or separate meetings. He wanted it debated at the Education Committee. I have challenged him every time that he has come before that Committee. When will we have a Bill? If the Minister is telling us today that it is coming soon, I very much welcome and acknowledge that. However, maybe he could tell us whether it will happen this side of Christmas or whether it will happen, as MacArthur told his troops, some time before some Christmas.

Mr O'Dowd: If I am awaiting the SDLP's assistance in bringing forward legislation, it will never come forward. So, thankfully, I am not awaiting the SDLP's assistance in bringing forward legislation. I am involved in discussions with all the other parties, which have done more than just ask questions. This is the difficulty for Mr McDevitt: being a politician is not simply about asking questions but about providing answers. That is where you fall down every time. You need to provide answers.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members, it has been a good-natured debate to date, and we have allowed a fair amount of interjections, but let the Minister be heard, please. I think that we are getting over and above a certain tolerance level.

Mr O'Dowd: So, there are challenges ahead for us as we move forward as a collective Assembly and Executive. Yes, I have outlined that there are frustrations. I am frustrated that we have not yet brought forward this legislation. However, I am confident that when those parties that are working on this issue bring forward legislation, it will have the best chance of going through the Assembly and of becoming law. We will then see the changes to education that are required. We will be able to leave all the rhetoric behind and have in place a working, functioning, single education authority delivering the best possible services to our young people.

Mr Dickson: A number of quotations were made in the Chamber, and I propose to make a few more. I ask Members to consider this quotation:

> *"The hub of future administration for education will be built upon a new Education Authority".*

That was the Secretary of State commenting on the review of public administration in November 2005, which is six years ago this month. The then Minister of Education said in July 2007:

> *"I intend to bring forward legislation later this year … with a view to having the ESA operational by April 2009 at the latest, and sooner if possible."*

The same Minister said in May 2008:

> *"Very soon I will bring forward the relevant legislation to the Assembly. … The time is now right to take forward the change".*

The Chair of the Education Committee, Mr Storey, told his party conference in the same year that people were:

> *"looking for leadership … for agreement, for movement, for clarity and for realism".*

Indeed, a year later, in December 2009, he told journalists that he did not care how long it took to resolve the issues that the DUP had with ESA.

Mr Storey: I stand over those comments for this simple reason: my party will not be signing off on, nor did we ever agree to, a Bill that was not fit for purpose. However, we have worked on the matter, as the Education Minister said. I have worked tirelessly over the past number of months to ensure that the issues that are at the heart of the matter are resolved in a way that means that when it comes to the House, we will have an agreement that we can sign off on.

Mr Dickson: Indeed, I acknowledge that, and that is where I am taking that comment.

The First Minister told us in October 2010 that he still hoped that a single authority could be established, and he said in September that plans to establish ESA were in their final stages. However, we still do not know where we are with ESA today. The Minister has had his opportunity and, quite frankly, he has blown it yet again today in this Chamber. Saying "the near future" is simply not good enough.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member suggests that I have "blown it". It would be very easy for the Minister to bring forward a motion calling for legislation to be brought forward for ESA, but what is much more difficult is bringing forward legislation to establish ESA. Why does your party not bring a draft Bill to establish ESA if you are so confident about the way forward?

Mr Dickson: As a political party, we have neither the resources nor the time to bring forward that Bill, but you, Minister, have the resources of an entire Department and the Administration of this Assembly behind you to do so. The Bill process that has already been developed is a good template to take things forward. Mr Storey and others — indeed, everyone in the Chamber today — seem united in the desire to have the change brought about for a single education authority in Northern Ireland.

The previous Bill may not have been perfect. Mr Storey and others have told us that a great many behind-the-scenes discussions have taken place and that we are now ready to move forward. However, the Minister has disappointed us by describing it as "the near future". We have been waiting for six years: six years of uncertainty that have chipped away at the morale of our schools; six years of wasted time in which we have failed to replace the overly bureaucratic administration system that has been in place for decades and is no longer fit for purpose, despite the valiant efforts of the staff and the boards who are struggling continuously to deliver a quality education for young people in Northern Ireland.

A totally disillusioned teacher in my constituency recently came to me. In that six-year period, he has been on only one education and library board training course because no longer have staff been available to deliver such training to any extent. His subject adviser left the board one year ago and has not been replaced. Where is the support for the dream education system that Northern Ireland believes it has?

We are not living in that dream world in Northern Ireland; we are living in the world of reality. We need quality legislation. It has been acknowledged around the Chamber that there were flaws and problems with the previous Bill. Every single Member has acknowledged that, whether it is transferors or the whole role of ESA. The Minister has said that there are problems around that, but problems are there to be solved.

I encourage the Minister, the Executive and all parties in the House to get their heads together to get this resolved and not to give us an answer that is "in the near future" but that contains a date and time by which a practical Bill can be brought forward in order to deliver a modern education system for our community and our society.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward legislation to establish the Education and Skills Authority within this Assembly session.*

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the Adjournment topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond and, on this occasion, all other Members who are called to speak will have eight minutes.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I presume from your instruction that the Minister intends to respond. I wonder whether I should wait for his arrival, as it is difficult to make a proposition and make some points if he will not be here to respond. Perhaps you will give me some guidance.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have been advised that we are expecting the Minister. It is not customary in this House to take a tea-break to allow for that to occur. We have to go ahead with the business. It is unfortunate that the Minister is not yet present.

Mr Murphy: I see that the Minister has now arrived, and I am glad to be able to begin. I thank the Business Committee for facilitating this Adjournment debate. As with all such debates, you can see from the attendance in the House that they are important to the constituency to which the subject is attached.

However, in this instance, I have to say that the provision of any type of service is important, particularly to rural constituencies. Most of us here, including the Minister, represent rural constituencies. We understand the importance of service provision, particularly in the border areas where, historically, service has tended to be poorer and much more sporadic. That is multiplied significantly when we are talking about the provision of acute medical services and the response to people who have injuries or illnesses. Provision of that service is all the more contentious, and the sensitivities and concerns around it are much more heightened.

Our raising for debate the issue of ambulance cover in the Newry and Armagh constituency, and particularly south Armagh where a lot of the issues arise, is in no way a reflection on the dedication or commitment of paramedic, casualty and other medical staff to the service that they provide. The communities that we represent very much value and respect the commitment and dedication, often above and beyond the call of duty, that paramedics and other medical staff demonstrate in providing care and services for the people of our area; I am sure that other Members concur with that view.

It is a question of the Ambulance Service's interpretation of policy and whether it is interpreting its own policy correctly. The targets for Ambulance Service cover are that an ambulance must reach the person or people affected within eight minutes in a category A incident and within 21 minutes in a category B incident. The target specifies that that is applicable in 70% of the instances in which the emergency services are called out. The statistics that we received pertain to the Newry and Mourne area and indicate that the Ambulance Service is exceeding those targets. I presume that that is also the case in the southern area generally, which is to be commended.

Although we would all want an ambulance to be with us within those time frames in 100% of cases, most reasonable people will accept that it is not always possible. There may be a major emergency elsewhere in the district, road closures, disruptions or a community event that has caused a road closure. In those cases, ambulances and rapid response vehicles will not always achieve the 21-minute and eight-minute targets. Most reasonable people will accept that they will be within those targets 70% of the time. As I said, the service is exceeding the targets, and that is to be welcomed.

There will be circumstances in which ambulance services are directed to another area, engaged in other business or have difficulty reaching the person or people in need of their services, regardless of how acute that need is. However, it cannot be acceptable — I will be interested to hear the Minister's view — that the Ambulance Service seems to indicate that it is acceptable that a certain proportion of people will live permanently outside that 70% response time. Therefore, a certain proportion of people will be beyond that response time 100% of the time.

As I said, most reasonable people will accept that they cannot have a service that is within those time frames 100% of the time. However,

I cannot see how, when that policy was created and crafted, it was accepted that a certain portion of the population, who pay their taxes the same as everyone else and are entitled to access to health services, acute services and emergency services, will be permanently beyond what is an acceptable target for the rest of the population. As I said, I will be interested to hear whether the Minister shares that interpretation. He, too, represents a large rural constituency. I cannot believe that it was ever intended that people would be permanently at a disadvantage in respect of the service that they can expect, particularly in this era of equality legislation, section 75, and whatever else.

In the south Armagh region — I am sure that it pertains to other rural areas, particularly border areas — many people in many areas find themselves permanently beyond that time frame. In places such as Coolderry, Loughross and Altnamackan over near Newtownhamilton, residents' lives are permanently in greater danger than those of other citizens of our district because of the operation of the policy. That is an unacceptable situation and is contrary to the ethos that underpins the provision of the health service, which is about treating patients of all shapes, sizes, ages, creeds and colours without discrimination. It is about an equality of provision and equality of access to healthcare provision, and the application of the policy, which leaves people at a permanent disadvantage when compared with many others, is contrary to that ethos.

4.45 pm

The entire area has been the subject of quite a lengthy campaign, which all parties in the area have supported. It has been through Newry and Mourne District Council, where the case about the lack of provision in the area has been argued out with representatives of the Ambulance Service. After several attempts, the Ambulance Service made a commitment to improved provision in the form of a rapid response vehicle, which was dedicated to the south Armagh area. My colleague Mickey Brady will expand on this issue, but in my view, the rapid response vehicle can be very useful but is essentially there to supplement and to improve ambulance provision and is staffed by a single paramedic. However, the basic principle of that type of emergency provision is the ambulance itself, and although people viewed the rapid response vehicle as at least some small step forward, that was completely undone by the fact that the vehicle, which was to provide a service for south Armagh, was based in Warrenpoint and, therefore, further away from the constituents it was to serve than the ambulance substation at Daisy Hill Hospital. That added some insult. Although it is absolutely no reflection on the staff who provide that service — they get there as quickly as they can and provide as good a service as they possibly can — the Ambulance Service's interpretation of the policy leaves a lot to be desired.

I welcome the fact that the Minister is here to hear our comments, and the solution that has been advocated for a long time by the people and the elected representatives of the area — they have probably articulated this unanimously — is that there is a requirement to base a substation somewhere in the south Armagh region. I am not sure how familiar the Minister is with the terrain, but there are areas that an ambulance will never reach within 21 minutes. The elderly mother of one of our councillors who lives in the Creggan area near Crossmaglen was knocked down and lay for 45 minutes on wet grass at the side of the road with a broken hip until ambulance cover could get out to treat her. That is not the norm, and the service is usually better, but that sort of issue undermines community confidence in the provision of healthcare for the area.

The solution has long been to locate a substation there that can keep everyone within the intended response time 70% of the time. That is acceptable. It is not acceptable for people to be permanently outside that, and to try to interpret those people who are permanently outside it as part of the 70% is incorrect. People who have engaged with the Ambulance Service at a senior level sense that it is somewhat underhand to try to include people who will always be beyond that time as part of the 30% who do not get that response within the time frame for which they hope. The solution is quite obvious: the provision of a substation somewhere in the area. It could be located centrally in the Silverbridge area or, as has been the case in many areas across this jurisdiction, ambulance provision could be co-located in an existing fire station. We have fire stations at Newtownhamilton and Crossmaglen, and either would be acceptable.

There is a real sense of concern in the area that despite pointing out the obvious deficiency

in provision of service over a number of years and despite promises from the Ambulance Service to address that, we still have a situation in which people live permanently beyond what is considered to be the acceptable response target for the Ambulance Service. None of us can stand over that situation.

I am sure that the Ambulance Service has provided the Minister with a briefing for today's debate. The service is no stranger to the problems that we have identified or the solutions that we have identified to address them. Therefore, I sincerely hope that the Minister has come with a statement telling us how he intends to address the deficiency in the provision of service. We need to ensure that all citizens whom we represent — whether in the townlands around Crossmaglen, Cullyhanna and Newtownhamilton or on over towards Keady and Derrynoose — have as much entitlement to treatment as anyone else. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will give us a sense of how he intends to address the situation. I dare to hope that he has a solution in his briefing folder to give to us today. At the very least, I would like a firm commitment from him to addressing the issue and ensuring that the most basic of provisions — the right to health and access to emergency services when in dire need — are accessible to 100% of the citizens entitled to it. That is the ethos that underpins a health service of which we are all rightly proud.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht tábhachtach seo. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta a thug an t-ábhar seo faoi bhráid an Tionóil inniu.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate, and I thank Mr Murphy for securing it. The matter is of grave concern to the people in the constituency of Newry and Armagh, particularly those in the south Armagh area. I am sure that it is also a matter of concern in other rural constituencies and has been for many years. In fact, the issue was first brought before the House in March 2002, when my late colleague Mr John Fee spoke in the debate.

When I met the chief executive of the Ambulance Service trust and his director of operations, I relayed to them directly the concerns of the local community about ambulance response times in rural areas, particularly in south Armagh. I reiterate those concerns today.

The current target is, as Mr Murphy said, to respond to category A calls within eight minutes. I understand that the Ambulance Service meets the target in more than 72% of cases, and that is to be welcomed. However, that happens primarily in towns, cities and built-up areas. The 28% of missed targets are largely in rural areas, so that is where the improvement must be. I call on the Minister to produce serious and detailed proposals to improve services in rural areas and further proposals on how he intends to provide a better service to reduce the percentage of missed targets.

There is no way that an ambulance travelling from Newry to Crossmaglen or, indeed, from Armagh to Derrynoose can reach its destination in eight minutes. Serious consideration must be given to locating ambulance services in rural communities. In this case, that could be done by locating a vehicle in the south Armagh area. I agree with Mr Murphy's proposal that the fire station at Newtownhamilton is central to the south Armagh area.

It is unfortunate that rural areas always seem to be at the bottom of the pecking order when it comes to health provision and, indeed, many government provisions. In my meeting with the Ambulance Service trust, I explained the deep frustration and concerns of local communities in south Armagh. I reflect that again today to the Minister, and I ask him and his officials actively to pursue the provision of an ambulance station in the Newtownhamilton area alongside the existing Fire and Rescue Service provision.

I also call on the Minister to task the Ambulance Service with looking at the possibility of greater cross-border co-operation in relation to ambulance services. We can no longer continue to look at health provision and ignore the possibilities that greater cross-border co-operation presents. I understand that there is a full and detailed study of the benefits of cross-border co-operation within the health field but that that report has yet to be published by the Department. I urge the Minister to publish that report. I cannot say at this time that that report includes ambulance services, but if it were to be published, we could make a judgement on that.

As has been said, the Ambulance Service provides a vital service, which all of us hope that we will never need. However, when an

ambulance is needed, it should be available within the target time across the region, to the greatest extent possible.

In conclusion, I urge the Minister to consider the comments made by all Members who speak in the debate, and I look forward to a positive response from him.

Mr McCallister: I apologise for the absence of my colleague the Member for Newry and Armagh Danny Kennedy. He is tied up with ministerial business, but he wanted a contribution to be made on this important subject, and I am happy to fill in for Danny today on the issue. I thank Mr Murphy and his colleagues for bringing the issue to the Floor, and I thank the Minister for being here.

As colleagues have pointed out, the Ambulance Service trust provides a vital life-saving service. It is at the front line in attending and responding to accidents and emergencies, and it provides that cover throughout Northern Ireland. Following on from Mr Bradley's point about rural areas, I am confident that since the Minister is a rural dweller, he will be keen to make sure that all areas of Northern Ireland are treated equally, fairly and proportionately and that cover gets to the more isolated parts of Northern Ireland that are difficult to access and to which it is difficult to provide the response times that we would like to see across the board.

Mr Murphy raised issues relating to cover and whether we could site a vehicle or ambulance station in a more appropriate location, given the fact that the nearest location for a rapid response vehicle is in Warrenpoint. The journey from Warrenpoint to some parts of Mr Murphy's constituency is difficult even though it is not a long distance as the crow flies. It is quite a difficult journey by road, particularly at busy times of the day. As a Member for South Down, I am not advocating that the Minister reduces cover in Warrenpoint, but there are sensible proposals on looking at how to integrate some of the existing facilities in the south Armagh area. We could see how best to use the resources that we have there and limit the impact on spend or costs that would be incurred by the Department of Health and by the Ambulance Service trust. There are positives there, which, I am sure, the Minister will look at. I am sure that he will look favourably on them to see how we might work to take the issue forward to provide the best cover for people in the Newry and Armagh constituency.

It is important to place on record our gratitude to paramedics and the Ambulance Service trust across the board for the work that they do and to say how pleased we are to see that that work could be recognised with the possibility of the Queen's Ambulance Service Medal for distinguished service. That is something to be welcomed. People who give outstanding service to our community deserve to have that recognised.

It will be interesting to hear the Minister's response on this important issue. My colleague Danny Kennedy and I are supportive of getting the best possible cover for all rural areas and in Newry and Armagh.

5.00 pm

Mr Irwin: Access to healthcare and emergency services is something that everyone in Northern Ireland expects, and rightly so. In Newry and Armagh, we have access to a number of medical facilities within a reasonable distance. I think of Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry and the Craigavon Area Hospital, which provide full accident and emergency services, and a number of other localised non-emergency facilities, including minor injuries units in Armagh and Dungannon. However, the topography of the Newry and Armagh constituency is such that, although we have two cities, we also have a number of towns and many smaller villages with significant population densities. Thousands of individual dwellings are scattered across an area covering many square miles of countryside. That presents a problem, particularly in more remote rural locations, which is where some of the issues lie.

Our Ambulance Service and paramedics deserve the highest praise and credit for the tireless service that they provide, not only in Newry and Armagh but right across Northern Ireland. I want to put on record my gratitude for the invaluable work that they do.

Some performance indicators suggest that response times are improving in Newry and Armagh, and, indeed, targets are being met. In the south Armagh district, almost 77% of 999 calls were responded to within the target time, which is an improvement on the previous year and better than the Northern Ireland average. The fact remains that response target times of eight minutes have not been met in the Crossmaglen area, but the actual response times for that location merit greater

examination. It is interesting to note that, in the past year, 24 emergency calls were responded to in the area, but none within the eight-minute target. Although that suggests failure, the vast majority of those call-outs were reached within 10 or 20 minutes, and, given the topography of the area, that is a reasonable response, although obviously not a perfect situation. That, of course, is cold comfort for someone who is critically ill, and it is frustrating for those at the scene who want an ambulance to arrive in the shortest possible time. Given that work is ongoing on how emergency response services are applied in rural areas, perhaps that locality could be studied again to see what additional improvements could be made to enhance response times and whether the meeting of targets can be improved on.

I understand the trust's position on how it arranges its emergency response, and, given the current economic climate, I doubt whether it will be possible to provide each and every address in the constituency with a sub-eight-minute response. However, where improvements can be made, they must be made, and I am sure that the Minister will explore the issue in greater depth as the debate continues.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for being here, and I endorse the comments made by previous contributors about the Ambulance Service and the wonderful service that it provides.

The Ambulance Service's annual report, particularly when referring to those who suffer strokes, talks about patient outcomes being directly linked to the speed of diagnosis and early intervention and about how ambulance personnel have a key role to play. The report describes how call takers instruct callers in the use of the face, arm, speech, time (FAST) technique to identify potential stroke victims. It outlines how responding ambulance crews perform further FAST tests on patients on arrival and, if they are positive, prepare patients for rapid transportation to the nearest hospital with facilities to manage stroke patients efficiently. The report explains how hospital staff are alerted to prepare for the patient's arrival and how they use hospital diagnostic tools such as CAT scans to confirm stroke diagnosis and administer thrombolysis if appropriate.

As was stated, the rapid response vehicle assigned to the south Armagh station is in Warrenpoint, and, if an incident occurred in, for example, Cullaville, that vehicle has a minimum 30-mile journey to reach the incident. That situation should not and will not be tolerated. A substation in Newry is required. Newtownhamilton and Crossmaglen have been suggested, and I am sure that the Minister will look at those suggestions in a positive way.

When a rapid response vehicle is activated in an emergency, a paramedic ambulance should also be activated, if available. There should not be a situation where, in an emergency, as is the case currently, the front line paramedic ambulance is not deployed until a report is received from the paramedic in the rapid response vehicle. Surely, vehicles should be sent in tandem. It also appears that not one rapid response paramedic has received the specialised training that is required, so I am not sure how they can instruct an ambulance crew about the situation.

The well-being of people in Newry and Armagh is paramount, and they should be treated in the same way as other people in the North. This question needs to be answered: why is a rapid response vehicle stationed in Warrenpoint, and why is it not much more accessible to Newry and Armagh? In the case of stroke victims, as I mentioned, it is essential that they get to hospital as quickly as possible and get the medication that they require urgently. Any delay can cause huge problems and makes the difference, in many cases, between making a good recovery and being badly affected, which, in the long run, will cost a lot more money in hospital and social care when the patient goes home. For some people, the delay can be fatal.

All we ask is that people in Newry and Armagh are treated in a fair and equitable manner. I am sure that the Minister will take account of what has been said today because it has been a recurring problem, one that has been addressed to a degree but not addressed as it should have been. I ask the Minister to consider carefully what has been said.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss ambulance provision in the Newry and Armagh area, an issue that has been raised with me in recent weeks.

I would like to thank the hard-working men and women of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service in the Newry and Armagh area for responding to emergency calls from members of

the public. The Ambulance Service is part of the front line in the provision of emergency care services in Northern Ireland. The job of the NIAS is to ensure that patients who are involved in an incident are clinically assessed, receive the necessary emergency treatment and care and, where appropriate, are transported to an A&E hospital as quickly as possible. That is the role that NIAS performs all day, every day. Just to put that in perspective, it means that, on average, there are 59 A&E ambulances and 22 rapid response vehicles on the road. There are never fewer than 43 A&E ambulances on the road, and, at peak times, the number of RRVs rises to 28.

As you may know, the ambulance cover provided by the NIAS is arranged into local commissioning group areas that run along the same boundaries as the health and social care trusts. The areas of Newry and Armagh fall within the southern LCG. Performance indicators are used to measure the performance of the NIAS in responding to different categories of call. Performance against those indicators is assessed according to each LCG, not to more localised geographical areas. The performance indicator for NIAS is that, from April 2011, an average of 72·5% of category A life-threatening calls should be responded to in eight minutes and not fewer than 65% in an LCG area. Although indicators are measured at LCG level, NIAS has been able to provide details on the BT35 postcode district, which is the south Armagh area of Newry. Between 1 September 2010 and 31 August 2011 in that area, nearly 77% of 999 calls were responded to within eight minutes. That represents an improvement of 2·6% on the previous year and is 2·35% better than the NI cumulative average. That is also higher than the cumulative average for the southern LCG area as a whole, where 69·1% of category A life-threatening calls were responded to within eight minutes, as of 16 October. That high level of performance follows a trend of steadily improving performance. Just a few years ago, performance for life-threatening calls was only 55% across Northern Ireland. That now stands at nearly 75%.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that, between September 2010 and August 2011, no emergency calls in the Crossmaglen area were responded to within the eight-minute target. You may ask, as Members have, why we do not provide more ambulances specifically for the Crossmaglen area. It is important to bear it in mind that there is an average of 26 emergency calls each year in that area. That means that in Crossmaglen there is roughly one 999 call every fortnight about a life-threatening condition. In a time of austerity and stretched resources, it is not operationally or financially feasible to deploy an emergency response vehicle specifically in that area for it to be unused 93% of the time. Instead, the NIAS deploys ambulances tactically, so that the nearest appropriate vehicle is sent to an incident. That means that the response to an emergency call in the Crossmaglen area may be provided by an ambulance or a rapid response vehicle that is not based at the nearest ambulance station. Where a vehicle is based does not dictate where it may be located when a 999 call comes in. It is too simplistic to just count the ambulances housed in a particular ambulance station. Rather, in an emergency anywhere in Northern Ireland, the nearest appropriate emergency resource will respond. The tactical deployment plan allowed the NIAS to respond to the 24 life-threatening emergency calls in Crossmaglen in 2011: three within 10 minutes, 20 in 10 to 20 minutes, and one took longer than 20 minutes.

I heard what Mr Murphy said about Warrenpoint. Perhaps we can give him some further information in writing about why the NIAS has chosen to use the Warrenpoint area for its additional resource. I also heard what Mr McCallister said about wanting to ensure that we did not diminish what was available in the Warrenpoint area. I am sure that Ms McKevitt would tend to agree with Mr McCallister on that issue.

Rural areas present a challenge to the NIAS, as they do around the world. By their nature and because of their topography and sparse populations, rural areas are more difficult to provide ambulance services for. As a result, my Department has been working with the NIAS for many years to improve ambulance response times in rural areas. Additional deployment points have been provided, along with additional RRVs, new information and dispatch systems and state-of-the-art vehicle location and satellite navigation systems. The regional emergency medical dispatch centre also now hosts doctors who triage the calls that come in, to make sure that A&E ambulances and RRVs are sent only to appropriate emergency incidents and to provide alternatives, as required.

I want Members and the public to know that, unlike other ambulance services in the UK, all our ambulances and RRVs are routinely crewed

by staff who are paramedics. That means that the patient who needs urgent treatment and care can start to receive it immediately; for example, pain relief and clot-busting drugs for heart attacks. Such early interventions are designed to improve not only patient comfort but clinical outcomes. I trust that that addresses the issue that Mr Brady raised.

Progress in our Ambulance Service requires substantial funding. In 2008, almost £100 million was committed over the ensuing 10 years to enable the NIAS to modernise its estate and replace its fleet and equipment regularly. For that reason, the response performance in the Southern LCG and throughout Northern Ireland shows that the NIAS is reaching more patients faster than ever. Even so, more work is still to be done, and there remain serious issues that I intend to address. For example, the NIAS recently discovered that more than one in five people who dialled 999 for an ambulance last year just wanted help with non-emergency problems. Of the 999 calls made last year, 28,500 did not require the expertise of a paramedic when they arrived at the scene. The NIAS received 1,686 hoax calls; 2,476 people called for information only; and 735 called for help to get them back into bed. That is a ridiculous waste of emergency services, which puts at serious risk the lives of those in real need.

5.15 pm

The public must realise that ambulances are not a taxi service either. People need to be educated about the different types of care that they can access instead of phoning for an ambulance. That is particularly relevant now that the temporary changes in Belfast accident and emergency provision have been introduced. I want to ensure that those changes in service provision are effectively communicated to the public so as to avoid any unnecessary confusion and waste of Ambulance Service resources. A full communication plan is under way for that purpose.

In recent years, the Ambulance Service has transformed itself with great success into a modern and responsive service capable of dealing with the emergency care needs of our entire population. The performance statistics speak for themselves, with a continuing upward trend throughout Northern Ireland and, indeed, more locally. I take this opportunity to congratulate NIAS on its hard work and progress in spite of difficult economic times, and I look forward to its continuing advancement.

As I said, I will write to explain why the Warrenpoint destination was chosen. I trust that that will be of some assistance. We can, perhaps, get an explanation of why Newtownhamilton was not chosen, as that may assist Members in relating the issues involved to concerned constituents.

Adjourned at 5.16 pm

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 14 November 2011

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Paul Givan has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22.

Mr Givan: The petition that is being presented today has come as a result of the draft proposal issued by the South Eastern Education and Library Board to close the mainstream part of Knockmore Primary School. Since that proposal was announced, it has generated a public outcry and has united that school and community even further, if it was at all possible to have even greater unity in Knockmore Primary School.

The primary school is a model of inclusion and integration of children of all educational abilities and religious beliefs, and the proposal to close the mainstream school in isolation segregates the school and fails to consider the indisputable impact on the 66 children in the special units. As a result, a petition was launched, and the public have demonstrated their outrage at what has been suggested.

In September, the Education Minister said:

> *"we must make sure that we support children with special educational needs". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 66, p260, col 1].*

At Knockmore Primary School, they do exactly what the Minister said in the House in September. Therefore, the Department and the board should be proud of what they have achieved at Knockmore Primary School, and, quite rightly, in March this year, they agreed a restructuring of the special units and recommended that capacity should be increased because of the good practice and quality of teaching that takes place in those special units. As recently as this year, the inspectorate's report said that the provision of education for children with special needs is very good and, across the school, ranges from good to outstanding, yet this school is faced with potential closure.

This proposal is wrong in that it comes ahead of the ministerial viability audit that the Education Minister has recently announced. What is needed is a comprehensive assessment for that catchment area, which would provide a proper evidence base on which to take sound decisions for that part of Lisburn.

The deliberate manipulation of enrolment figures for Knockmore Primary School, which segregates a school that is truly integrated, is what is driving this particular agenda, through a statistical analysis by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. The board is trying to create something that the school has never been. It has always been united and integrated. For the board to segregate it in such a fashion is unacceptable. Financially, the school has a surplus, which is projected to remain for the next three years. Therefore, there is no financial driver for the proposal.

In conclusion, the petition highlights how the partnership arrangement between the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the board has worked. The board and the trust have an agreement that states that they are committed jointly to a continuous process of co-operation and partnership. They have not done that in this case.

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

Mr Givan: The petition demonstrates that what is needed is for commissioners to back off and allow the school to continue to provide educational excellence. The 9,000 people who have signed the petition are saying, "Leave our

school alone. Let the children be given the best opportunity to progress, which they deserve".

Mr Givan moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister of Education and a copy to the Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the thirteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in environment sectoral format, which was held in NSMC headquarters in Armagh on Friday 21 October 2011.

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Kennedy, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting, which I chaired. The Irish Government were represented by Mr Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. The statement has been agreed by Minister Kennedy.

The Council welcomed ongoing developments in waste management. It also welcomed the closer working relationship between Departments to align policies where appropriate in areas of mutual benefit. Ministers received presentations on arrangements for dealing with food waste, including organic waste, where there are opportunities to do more on an all-Ireland basis given our mutual schemes.

The Council noted that environment Ministers launched the 'Irish Recycled Plastic Waste Arisings Study' jointly in September. The North/South market development steering group will now consider it. As I said to the House previously, only 30% of plastic waste on the island of Ireland is recycled. Of that 30%, only 30% is recycled on the island of Ireland. Those figures are not good. Clearly, there is a challenge for both Administrations to do more in that regard. The Council also noted the recent publication of a tender for a bulky waste reuse management best practice study and the first meeting of the quality protocols subgroup.

Ministers also welcomed ongoing progress towards implementing the EU landfill directive. The Council also noted that the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government is willing to engage with the

Department of the Environment (DOE) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to consider current restrictions in the UK plan with regard to cross-border, trans-frontier, shipment-of-waste movements of mixed municipal solid waste from Northern Ireland to Ireland. That is an important matter. We have an unusual situation in which untreated waste can be moved from Belfast to Bristol but cannot be moved from Newry to Meath. There is some contradiction and tension therein, which could be interrogated further and worked through satisfactorily.

The Council welcomed the ongoing co-operation and sharing of experience between the DOE and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners in the development of the DOE's carrier bag levy project. I acknowledge the assistance of the Dublin Administration, as they have had longer, good experience of reducing the number of single-use and reusable bags and generating useful funds for central government. The model of practice in Dublin may be of assistance as we develop our model of practice here in Northern Ireland.

The Council noted that the removal of waste from a site at Ballymartin near Kilkeel was nearing completion and that work was expected to commence on a further site, if possible, later this year. Since the statement was agreed with Minister Kennedy, work at the Ballymartin site has been completed, and it is expected that initial work on the site on the Belfast Road, Newry will be taken forward in the very near future.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is continuing to develop plans to deal with the remaining illegal waste sites, of which there were 13 in total, and is working closely with its counterparts in Dublin City Council. Ministers discussed and commended the joint enforcement actions being conducted by the competent authorities. Those actions are ongoing and, indeed, in the very recent past, the authorities, North and South, conducted joint enforcement action on illegal waste issues.

Ministers noted that the North/South working group on water quality is considering a range of water quality issues, including abstraction and impoundment controls, nitrates, shellfish waters, bathing waters, the scope for all-Ireland beach awards and INTERREG IVa projects, with a view to the formulation of a work programme for agreement at a future meeting.

The Council noted that the North/South working group on water quality is continuing to drive and to oversee the co-ordinated implementation of river basin management plans and associated measures under the EU water framework directive.

Environmental reporting and research issues were also touched on, and all three Ministers welcomed the ongoing work on a common set of environmental indicators, including web-based presentation and the planned publication of 'Ireland North and South: A Statistical Profile', which should be in place next year.

The Council noted progress by NIEA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in taking forward joint actions on research to support the implementation of environmental policy and legislation and welcomed further co-operation in supporting researchers seeking European funding for priority environmental research under the EU seventh framework programme (FP7), INTERREG and LIFE+ programmes.

That latter point is crucial, given that we all now acknowledge the scale of European funding, which is €50 billion for FP7, and other environmental funding under different programmes. The opportunities to exploit simply have not been taken by the Department and the Northern Ireland Government. We have a lot to learn quickly from our colleagues in the South. They have the inside track when it comes to European funding and have created architecture in government to maximise the opportunities to draw down funding. There are issues, and we need urgently to learn lessons for the residue of FP7 and for when eighth framework programme (FP8) commences in 2014. That six-year programme has €80 billion of funds available for research and development and innovation.

The Council agreed to hold the next environment meeting in February 2012.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): The Committee welcomes the Minister's statement, and we are very pleased to hear that co-operation on environmental issues has been not only productive but very constructive. We hope that that will continue in the future. Will he confirm that when more responsibility for dealing with fly-tipped waste is passed back to the councils, they will not be required to deal with any hazardous waste?

12.15 pm

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question. As she rightly identified, constructive work is done on the environment on a North/South basis. That is why I find it increasingly frustrating that the St Andrews review of North/South mechanisms that was initiated in early 2007 has yet to publish its phase 1 report on existing North/South implementation bodies and co-operation. It is also frustrating that it has barely started, if at all, its phase 2 report on identifying opportunities for North/South developments going forward.

So, here we are in the eye of an economic storm, the scale of which we still do not know, given developments in Europe and beyond. Yet, opportunities to scope, identify and take forward North/South co-operation on a whole range of initiatives have barely been touched. If we cannot get our act together and get through the political fog that those North/South opportunities throw up, future generations on the island, both North and South, will live with the adverse consequences. It is a matter that needs to be addressed, and I am asking my Executive colleagues, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister and the leadership of the Irish Government, now that we have a new Irish Government, not to waste a further moment. A moment will arise this Friday when we will have a further meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in Armagh, where those matters will have to be taken forward.

The Member identified that under recent contaminated lands legislation, new requirements for fly-tipping will be laid down. However, it is already the case that councils have significant responsibilities in the disposal of materials that have been identified in, for example, fuel laundering. So, councils already have responsibilities that will be extended to fly-tipping, as opposed to those areas of existing concern. However, it is clear that when it comes to working with councils on hazardous waste, the best advice and assistance will be provided to them to ensure that risks are mitigated.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. I refer him to the item in the statement that deals with the repatriation of waste. It obviously highlights the particular advance that has been made on the Ballymartin site at Kilkeel. Can the Minister give us any update on the timescale for the full removal of the remaining 13 or 14 sites and whether there has been any progress on speeding that process up?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. I am pleased that he acknowledged the work at Ballymartin. That clean-up concluded at the end of October. Over 20,000 tons of waste and nearly 500 tons of leachate were removed. Fortunately, in that case, no chemical or hazardous waste was identified on the site. The task was immense, if at least less perilous, given that that no chemical or hazardous waste was identified. As I indicated, work on the Belfast Road, Newry site is due to commence in the near future. I know what the time frame for that is, but I do not want to comment further on it. However, I hope that during this calendar year, the waste at that site will be addressed.

I cannot recall off the top of my head, but I think that the original time frame for the repatriation of illegal waste at the 13 sites in the North of Ireland was up to 10 years. However, I will check that for the Member. That time frame has been agreed under a framework agreement between the Belfast Administration and Dublin, which, in this instance, is represented by Dublin City Council. That is the authority that is dealing with the Department of the Environment on this matter. There is no indication that there has been any slippage of that time frame, which may be implicit in the Member's question, given that that arose in another significant North/South project in the past number of days. Hopefully, more certainty will be created in that matter going forward.

I refer to previous answers that I have given on the Floor. The time frame that was originally indicated continues to be that by which we will be judged. If there is any contrary time frame, I will come back to the Member.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. Will he share some of the experiences, to which he referred in his statement, in relation to the carrier bag levy? Will he also indicate when he proposes to introduce that levy? What projects or legislation will be held up in the interim if the levy is not introduced?

Mr Attwood: It may not have leaked out yet, but, then again, those things are not meant to happen around the Executive table. Last Thursday, the Executive agreed to further legislation on carrier bags because the original legislation, which was passed earlier this year

by the Assembly, had a limited mandate in that it was for single-use carrier bags. As we all know from shopping, reusable carrier bags are now commonplace. The evidence afforded to me confirmed that if we proceed as we will do — I will explain that in a second — with the single-use carrier bag levy, there will probably be a displacement. Rather than pay whatever amount for a single-use carrier bag, customers would choose to purchase a reusable bag at a slightly higher price.

The consequence of that would be that the intended revenue stream to government under the carrier bag legislation would not be realised, nor would the intended and more primary environmental considerations; namely, to reduce the number of carrier bags in circulation. The Executive agreed last week that further legislation would be brought to the Assembly, which would extend the carrier bag levy to all categories of carrier bags, single-use and reusable. It may well be that, in the fullness of time, by way of regulation, certain bags would be exempted. Those used by chemists, or by butchers for meat, may not be subject to the carrier bag levy, but that is for another day.

Independent of that, in order to create greater rigour around the law, I advised my Executive colleagues, and they, with a little hesitancy from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, agreed that the proposal in the original legislation that was passed earlier this year would still proceed independently of the new legislation on multiple-use carrier bags. The consequence of that is that the levy scheme for single-use carrier bags is intended to be in place by the 2013-14 financial year. The consultation to be concluded in respect of all that will provide a direction of travel towards that outcome.

There are still issues to be resolved. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is not being helpful to the devolved Administration in relation to the collection of that levy. It would be a simple matter for HMRC to use a computer programme to collect the carrier bag levy once it is introduced in the 2013-14 financial year. The Minister of Finance and Personnel is working with me to prevail upon HMRC to collect that revenue stream on behalf of the Northern Ireland Government going forward, but, at the moment, it is showing some resistance. There are major managerial, logistical and operational issues around the levy scheme, but I have created certainty around the single-use carrier bag levy scheme, and I hope to create certainty, through new legislation, around reusable bags as well.

Mr Kinahan: I am glad that we are going to have a chance to discuss what we are going to do about the carrier bag levies. However, I would like to ask about water quality. I am under the impression that we are not likely to meet our EU targets. I wonder whether the Minister had a chance to discuss best practice in ensuring water quality improvements with his North/South Ministerial Council colleagues and whether any actions on best practice were forthcoming from the meeting.

Mr Attwood: On the current pattern, we will be able to comply with the requirements of EU water directives. However, it may have been hinted at in the question that new EU water directives will be coming down the track in 2016. Whatever the standards that we lived by and were faithful to heretofore, the standards going forward are going to be more rigorous.

One reason why I convened water and beach summits over the past few months was to make the Government and those who have an interest in these matters acutely aware that although we should be doing more in the current phase to address water quality, we need to get together to discuss future demands on water quality.

The consequence of all that is that some of our beaches that attain a high status for beach water quality would fail on the far side of 2016. The consequence of the new water directive is that more demanding requirements may be made of the North in respect of septic tanks. As was touched on during Question Time last week, we, unlike in the South, have a good regime in place. Unlike in the South, we are not likely at this stage to be on the wrong side of infraction proceedings because of issues around septic tanks. I am acutely aware of the issue. There was a TV programme the other day on which a specialist was talking about global water issues. Basically, the issues are that some do not have enough, and although the West may have enough, there is an issue with quality.

As the Member will be aware, good work has been done between the North and the South on water quality. The river basin management strategies are evidence that now that the South and the North have strategies in place for all relevant river basins, we are working in a much more co-ordinated way. Ultimately, issues

around the environment, water, wind and wave are such a shared and common resource and opportunity that the more that we work together and integrate what we are doing, the better that we will all be.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he give us some indication as to what plans he has for the further integration of waste policies and tell us about any discussions that he may have had in that regard with his counterpart in the rest of the country?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. That is an example of how, if we can cut through the politics around North/South, the potential future opportunities are nearly unparalleled for any North/South developments. What should we be looking at? We are about to review our waste management strategy in the North. In taking forward a new waste management strategy, we should learn from best practice on these islands and identify opportunities for doing things together on this island. I previously advised the House of a joint North/South study on the use of plastic recyclates. As I said in my opening remarks, there is a quite disturbing figure when it comes to plastic recycling on the island of Ireland: we recycle only 30% of what we could, and 70% goes into landfill. Of the 30% that is recycled, only 30% is recycled on the island of Ireland, with 70% getting exported. There are opportunities on the island of Ireland to recycle plastics more and to recycle higher numbers of plastics that get recycled more. Work is being done, arising from 'The Irish Recycled Plastic Waste Arisings Study', to identify where there might be commercial or business opportunities on a North/South basis to deal with plastics.

When it comes to food, we intend, in the next number of months, to launch a programme about how the hospitality sector disposes of food and packaging waste. Much more could be done in that regard.

That should be done on an all-Ireland basis, because the Republic of Ireland has a green hospitality scheme that deals with the issue of food and packaging waste, and, clearly, there are opportunities for one to learn from the other to deploy best practice and to integrate where possible. Those are just three examples of the scale of the opportunity to take North/South action on recycling, waste disposal and waste management generally.

12.30 pm

As we roll out the procurement strategy through the three procurement groups for the three sets of councils, in all likelihood, there will a need for some interim measures. As those procurements develop and get built and commissioned, in order to comply with EU directives, there may be some opportunity to dispose of some of our waste through mechanisms in the South. Ultimately, when the procurement plants are all commissioned, there may be greater opportunities on a North/South basis for trade in waste that cannot be disposed of in any other manner.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement. I shall draw the Minister back to item 8. Can he expand on the problems due to the present restrictions on cross-border movement of mixed municipal waste from Northern Ireland to Southern Ireland?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for that question. As I indicated in my opening remarks, given that we are, for now, separate jurisdictions, movements from the North to the South are deemed to be transnational or trans-boundary in nature. The consequence of that is that there are European requirements that do not allow untreated municipal waste to move from one jurisdiction to another without a scale of treatment being applied to that waste before it goes across the border. Given that we are, for now, a member of the United Kingdom, that rule does not apply. That is why I was able to say that you can move untreated municipal waste from Belfast to Bristol or from Newry to Norwich, but, if you were to move waste from Newry to Meath — a plant is under construction for the disposal of waste in Meath — it would require to be treated. The scale of treatment is not necessarily that demanding, but some level of treatment is required to ship waste between the North and the South.

It is a difficult issue, and, although we might look for an opportunity to accommodate the disposal of waste and waste management generally on a North/South basis, it will escalate to a European-wide basis. Because you are dealing with so many member countries of the EU, what might be a local remedy for an Irish problem may not be the right remedy for a European problem. Nonetheless, we are looking at, interrogating and scoping out the issue and seeing whether something can be done.

Mr T Clarke: I also thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, your statement focused on illegal waste, but have any opinions been expressed on waste that was not deposited illegally? I am thinking particularly of Ballymena Borough Council. It was, at a time, issuing its own licence to lay waste in lands, and that waste has now caused contamination. More should be done about the borough councils to prevent the outfall of that being put upon the landowners.

Mr Attwood: That matter has not been flagged up before, and I am not aware of the situation in Ballymena. I am aware of situations around the North, including my constituency, where, in my view, the then local and regional government managed issues of waste disposal very casually. That may have led to contaminants being part of landfill. There was not sufficient regulation of how water and leachate came off those lands. I am not aware of the particular circumstances, but I will look at them. However, I am aware of other circumstances where the management of waste did not, in my judgement, live up to the standards that were necessary. That is why, as I have said on the Floor previously, I have advised officials that we will have a robust and, at times, uncompromising approach to the enforcement of environmental requirements when it comes to the application or removal of licences.

Without going into detail — these are live issues — there have been examples of consistent and absolutely best practice and the proper interpretation of licence conditions. There are businesses in the North that now know that there is a more rigorous and robust approach to ensure that the right standards are complied with when it comes to environmental law and environmental licences. If there are issues with respect to Ballymena, I would welcome hearing more from the Member.

Mr Swann: Thank you, Minister. You referred to the waste management companies in one of your answers. Are you committed to maintaining the three large waste companies that we have, or would you, perhaps, move to one large company or another alternative? If you are minded that way, what would the future be for the large companies already in place to deal with waste?

Mr Attwood: I accept the argument that, although we may continue the good progress made in waste management and recycling in recent years, where there is a healthy story to be told, when the Programme for Government comes out, hopefully we will see a much more challenging target for recycling objectives in the lifetime of this Government and the period up to 2020-25.

Ultimately, however, I accept that, whatever the direction of travel may be for waste being recycled, there will be a need for alternative disposal. That is why we have procurement going on in respect of the three companies reflecting the 26 councils in the North. I am highly vigilant around that procurement process. It runs into hundreds of millions of pounds and stretches out over the next 25 years. Therefore, councils that are members of the three procurement groups and central government must be absolutely satisfied that all affordability and deliverability hurdles will be jumped.

I had a meeting with the waste management board just last week, at which the three procurement groups were represented, as well as their council sponsors. I made it very clear that I would continue to be rigorous and robust on the standards of affordability and deliverability. Although the direction of travel remains positive and the three procurement groups have moved at somewhat different paces, all three are nonetheless moving in a positive direction. I will robustly interrogate all that to ensure that the outcome reflects our waste needs, represents value for money and a price that the community and ratepayers in the North can afford and is deliverable with regard to planning and wider management issues.

I have said publicly that we need to see a single waste authority some time down the road. There has been scoping done on that. I have advised the procurement groups and the waste management board that that is my view. I believe that that is the right direction of travel. It will provide a more cohesive and co-ordinated approach to waste management strategy and produce efficiencies and better value for money. However, that is for another day, although that day may not be that far away. The issue for today is making sure that the three procurement groups fulfil the standards of affordability and deliverability. On that matter, I am sure there is a lot more to tell.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his statement. Further to his last answer, will the Minister outline what perceived benefits would come from a single waste authority? Will he also recognise that there is concern in the community that, of the existing three groups in the procurement process that is being followed, the

ratepayers may not get the advantage or benefits that they should if the new contracts are being negotiated as of now rather than five years ago?

Mr Attwood: I thank both him and the Member who asked the previous question because, given the scale of the issues — the hundreds of millions of pounds that are involved, the length of the contracts and all the factors that I outlined previously — this really is a matter that requires vigilance at government level and at Assembly and Committee level. I very much welcome the questions and encourage more interrogation of me and by me when it comes to this entire project.

The reason for that is self-evident. When I was in DSD, there were 33 housing associations. I indicated that, given the particular character of local identities and housing needs in the North, there should be between 10 and 15 housing associations to best manage housing association stock and newbuilds. That would also reflect the need for better efficiency and greater value for money. I hope that that work is ongoing in DSD as I speak.

Similarly, with respect to RPA, people will be aware that I believe the right number of councils for the North is 15. That number reflects local identity and loyalties, and it is a good model for the future, given the indicative savings under the ICE programme. It is also more consistent with the number of Westminster constituencies that we will have. For good reasons, 15 councils reflects what we need in the North and the need for efficiency and value for money.

Similarly, with the waste authority, whilst the three procurement groups were a consequence of issues in politics a number of years ago, it seems to me that the better model is a single authority. I am not going to do anything at the moment that would in any way impede the work of the three procurement groups. However, on the far side of that and perhaps sooner rather than later, this is a matter that we need to address and conclude.

Mr Allister: The Minister was anxious to assure us that there has been no slippage in the repatriation of waste to the Republic. However, if we examine his statement today and compare it with his parallel statement of just two months ago, there demonstrably has been slippage. He told us in September that work was expected to commence on the further two sites in Ballymartin in August —that was taken from the July statement of the North/South body — on a site north of Newry in early September 2011 and on 13 sites further down the line. Yet, today, he tells us that work has been completed on only one of the sites at Ballymartin, the second one has not even been mentioned and there is some vague aspiration of starting work at Newry, which was meant to start in September. There has been slippage. Why has there been slippage in such a short period? Does that not bode ill for the overall plan of dealing with the outstanding repatriations?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question, which confirms, on the one hand, that you should beware the lawyer's mind but, on the other, listen carefully to the politician's words. The words that I used were "expected to commence", because there are inevitable circumstances beyond the control of the Minister or government that can lead to difficulties with a site. For example, the Member will be aware that issues around farming, such as slurry spreading, over the past number of months have become more uncertain because of the weather. There are interventions beyond the control of government that lead to having to revise how you do a bit of political business.

Similarly, in respect of repatriation of waste from sites, I was cautious in saying "expected to commence", because the principle on which we are moving forward is that we do not work on more than one site at a time. That is good practice because, when people began to dig at Ballymartin, we did not know if they might discover chemical hazardous waste. If there were material on the site that would put people at risk or peril, the management of that site might become somewhat different. Moreover, the scale of what you discover at any one site means that you have to manage it over a slightly longer period. Therefore, when I used the words "expected to commence", I meant that we expected the work at the Newry site to commence in September. There has been some slippage, but not in the commitment that, subject to what people find when they start digging up that ground shortly, the repatriation of waste from the Belfast Road site in Newry is expected to commence and be completed in this calendar year. If that changes further because of circumstances beyond my control, I will alert Members, but I think that I have lived up to the principle that the work was expected to commence, albeit that I note the lawyer's mind.

12.45 pm

Committee Business

Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections

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

The Speaker has received a letter from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to say that, due to her attendance at an EU Agriculture Council meeting in Brussels today, she is unable to be present and junior Minister Anderson will respond to the motion on her behalf.

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

> *That this Assembly notes the latest announcement by the European Commission on financial corrections to be levied against the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development; expresses concern about the potential effect on the Executive's Budget; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make a full and urgent report to the Assembly on the extent of the financial corrections, the actions she is taking to address the issue of non-compliance and how, when and by whom these moneys will be repaid.*

Before I deal with the content of the motion tabled in the name of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I want to acknowledge that Minister O'Neill is unable to be present to respond to the debate because she is in very important discussions in Brussels. Alongside counterparts from Scotland and Wales, she is meeting the EU Agriculture Commissioner to discuss the CAP reform proposals. She is also meeting the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Caroline Spelman MP. It is good to see our Minister pushing our views in a UK sense. Hopefully, she will push our agenda on future CAP reform along with that of the UK. I welcome that and the fact that junior Minister Anderson will respond on behalf of the Minister and the Executive.

The Committee was prompted to table the motion because of an announcement by the European Commission on 18 October 2011 that requires the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to pay back another £4 million pounds. The first component of the motion reflects that, and the second part invites the Assembly to express its concern about the potential effect on the Executive's Budget.

There has been much speculation about the total amount of money involved, some of which may be unhelpful or inaccurate. However, it is clear that, even before the latest announcement, Northern Ireland had already incurred fines and disallowances of more than £60 million for administering farming subsidies incorrectly as long ago as 2005. Last month, the Committee questioned officials about the sums involved and did not get very satisfactory answers. There is no doubt that that led to the state of confusion that we are in today. The Committee was very concerned about those fines.

I want to draw attention to 'Financial Auditing and Reporting: General Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland — 2011', which contains qualified audit opinions on not one but two potential financial corrections that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development included, for the first time, in the 2010-2011 resource accounts as amounts due to be paid to the EU Commission. The report reveals that the Department calculated the risk to the European agriculture fund by examining 1% of single farm payment declarations. In submitting its report to the EU Commission, the Department assessed the risk to be in the range of £11·75 million and £18·38 million for the scheme year 2009. For the scheme year 2010, there has not yet been an EU Commission audit, nor has the Department been asked to calculate the actual risk to the fund for that year. Furthermore, as the Department does not know the Commission's intentions for 2010 or 2011, it has concluded that it would be premature to include any amounts due for those years in the report submitted to the Commission.

At the meeting at which the Committee questioned officials, there was speculation that, aside from the not insignificant amounts of £60 million and £4 million that we heard about a number of weeks ago, there might be a further £45 million outstanding. How was that £45 million calculated? I believe that someone has taken the midpoint between the £11·75 million and £18·38 million that I mentioned; let us say that that is £15 million. They are basically

hedging their bets. If you apply that over three years, you will get a total of £45 million. If that is government accounting, it is not as complicated as I thought. Perhaps the junior Minister will enlighten us today or the Minister will do so when she makes her statement next week. The question that I pose is this: if the Minister and the Department are on top of this, why are they still calculating £15 million year on year? Should it not be £15 million this year, £10 million next year and £5 million the year after? Is the problem getting better or worse?

Minister O'Neill's predecessor made a statement on disallowance to the House in September 2010. The then Minister said:

> *"Since April 2005, over €4 billion has been disallowed across the EU". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 55, p223, col 2].*

She also said that she had significant concerns about the heavy-handed approach being adopted by the European Commission and that the Commission might be overestimating the risk to public funds. The implication was that the issue was not peculiar to Northern Ireland; and I recognise and accept that fact. However, I believe that, especially in the very unstable financial circumstances prevailing across Europe, the Assembly and the Committee are absolutely right to be concerned about the potential effect that the financial corrections might have on the Executive's budget.

If we are not entitled to the money in the first place, it is only proper that it is paid back. However, we should not have received the money in the first place. That is why the next part of the motion calls on the Minister to make a full and urgent report to the Assembly on the extent of the financial corrections. The Committee believes that, by bringing a full and urgent report to the Assembly, the Minister will be able to set out precisely how much money will have to be paid back and how much of it is to be returned because of non-compliance or disallowance; the extent of the fines or financial penalties included in the overall amount; and the scheme or schemes that the disallowances have been applied against.

Somewhat bizarrely and even though the disallowances and fines date back to 2005, I am led to believe that no money has yet been repaid. That brings me back to the Comptroller and Auditor General's report. In section 3, he questions the regularity of the Department's accounts for 2010-11 because it included an amount of £19·4 million as due to be paid in financial corrections:

> *"to make good the shortfall in EU funding".*

There are rather chilling words at paragraph 3.3.18, where he says that that:

> *"therefore represents a loss to public funds which falls outside the Assembly's intentions in relation to the proper administration of EU funding."*

The Comptroller and Auditor General:

> *"concluded that expenditure has not been applied for the purposes intended by the Assembly and is not in conformity with the authorities which govern it."*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Department disagrees with that opinion. However, the Comptroller and Auditor General holds to the view:

> *"that the losses are irregular as funds have not been applied for the purposes intended."*

I mentioned the figure of £18·3 million for 2009, but I then said that the Department's accounts for 2010-11 included £19·4 million to be paid back to the EU. I assure Members that I am not involved in some creative accounting to get the figures to go from £18·38 million to £19·4 million. Rather, there is the small case of the second financial correction that I mentioned earlier, which dates back to 2003-04 and relates to the bovine premium scheme. The Department is due to repay £1·01 million. The good news is that that is a one-off financial correction that will not be repeated, as the scheme ended in 2004.

Not unreasonably, the final part of the motion calls on the Minister to report on the actions that she is taking to address non-compliance. I am sure that the junior Minister today and the Minister next week will stress the work that is being done on mapping and inspections, and that is fair enough. However, I return to the Minister's predecessor, who said in the House last year:

> *"The Department cannot rule out further corrections in respect of 2009 and later years, although our current work should militate against that."*

Nevertheless, as I said, officials are now calculating corrections of £15 million year on year. The former Minister went on to say:

> *"We do not expect any Commission decision on disallowance until 2011. Of course, we will seek*

to minimise it, both by bringing in new measures quickly and through negotiation." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 55, p224, col 2].

I hope that junior Minister Anderson will be able to report specifically on what new measures were brought in, when they were brought in and how effective they have been.

The motion was brought to the House to get clarity on the extent of non-compliance and disallowance, and I want to know how much money will have to be repaid —

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

Mr Frew: — when it will be repaid and by whom it will be repaid. I also want to find out, in detail, what has been done —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Frew: — what is being done and what remains to be done.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. The issue is a concern. Any issue brought to the Assembly for which fines are incurred from Europe has to be a concern for us all. I would prefer the debate to have been held on a day when the Minister could be here to respond to it, as is the normal practice. Nonetheless, the Committee was concerned about going ahead with the motion today, fully cognisant of the Minister's absence. I welcome the Committee Chairman's remarks that the consensus on the Committee was that her attendance in Brussels was important for agriculture here and that that was where she needed to be. I look forward to junior Minister Anderson's response in her stead.

As I said, this is an issue of concern. The context was the change in the EU's method of paying grants, which were previously based on production. However, that led to butter mountains and milk lakes. In 2005, that changed to a single payment based on the land area being farmed. That was a huge change for the Department and for farmers right across Europe to administer. The maps that were then available to the Department had been produced by Ordnance Survey, and the eligible land was mapped on to those. That system was developed in 2005, two years before the Executive were reinstated in 2007. Concerns about the mapping exercise were raised by EU officials in 2006. That was disputed by the Department, and it was an ongoing dispute between the Department and the EU until 2007, when the previous Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development came into office. It was 2008 before the matter was elevated to the Minister as a serious problem between DARD and EU officials.

It was known that the change of system would come in in 2005. Therefore, questions must be asked about what preparations DARD made to accommodate the new system and about why, when the EU raised concerns about the maps that DARD was using and the land that it considered to be currently farmed, it took until 2008 to elevate the matter to a serious ministerial concern. I look forward to a response today and, as the Chairperson said, to the Minister's return next week and a statement on the issue.

It became clear that there was going to be a dispute and, potentially, fines. The Chairperson made reference to why we should pay back the money. That would be fine if we were paying back only the money that we were not entitled to, but we are paying back 5% of £300 million of grants, when the dispute is about only £60 million of grants. The return on that is substantially higher than the overpayment that was incurred. That is an injustice that continues to be challenged through the European courts.

1.00 pm

The mapping exercise for some 750,000 fields has begun. It should be brought to a conclusion as speedily as possible because, ultimately, that is the way to end the dispute between DARD and the EU and, subsequently, to engage with the EU. That was the three-pronged approach that was agreed by the Executive, the farming unions, the MEPs and the previous Agriculture Committee: engage with the EU, tell them what we are doing and offset the problems that had arisen. That approach should continue to serve us well as we try to put an end to this problem.

The levy is not confined to here. Levies have been announced for France, Greece and, I think, Spain. This week, a fine of £30 million was announced for Scotland. It is, therefore, a problem that extends across the EU. Nonetheless, our concern is the money that we want to have available to us, and we want to make sure that that is not being spent on fines in the EU. In that regard, we want answers as to why it took so long for DARD to catch on to the

problem. We would like to see the urgency with which the issue is being dealt to be displayed in getting the mapping exercise right. We would also like to see continued support across all sectors in letting the EU know that we consider the fines to be disproportionate to the problem that has been created. Furthermore, recognition must be given to the work that has been done, with some degree of urgency over the past number of years, on the substantial exercise of changing the old maps, examining aerial photographs and the remapping of every field across the North for which a subsidy is being claimed. That is the area that we want to focus on.

I look forward to hearing answers today. The Committee is right to raise this as a matter of concern, because we scrutinise the functions of the Department. We want answers, and we want to see the issue being dealt with quickly.

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

Mr Murphy: We want to pull together to make sure that we get the quickest possible solution to the issue. That will enable us to get onto a proper footing with Europe and to put the issue to the side for all time.

Mrs Dobson: I support the motion and the will of the Committee to bring this important issue to the House. A fine in the region of £100 million would be a body blow to Northern Ireland public finances and a bitter pill for our local economy to swallow at any time but especially in the present economic climate. The public will undoubtedly be extremely concerned at the potential scale of the fine that the Executive are facing as a result of DARD's mismanagement of the single farm payment scheme.

At a time when the Executive are beginning the process of redistributing the £400 million that had been set aside for the A5 project, it is appalling to think that a large chunk of that funding could be paid back to the EU in the form of a fine instead of being put to use to make a real difference across Departments. It could go towards introducing measures to alleviate fuel poverty, especially among pensioners and the most vulnerable, and tackling the inequalities in our preschool system, for instance. A small proportion of the money could go into the agrifood sector, of course, which is one of the few growth areas in our economy. The money would offer massive potential in fuelling job creation and furthering economic growth in that sector. At a time of economic difficulty, we simply cannot afford to hand back money in this fashion.

In her press statement following the announcement of the Committee motion, the Minister said that the issue, which she described as technical and complex, required the co-operation of the farming industry. However, farmers have been co-operating with DARD for years on the issue and, as a result, have been penalised, often through no fault of their own. Their only mistake has been to place their trust in DARD and the farm maps issued by the Department.

DARD's continued errors in the farm mapping system have led directly to long-running inaccuracies in single farm payments. Farmers are fed up with co-operating with the Department only to be given retrospective fines. I share the concerns of farmers regarding their long-running issues with defective mapping systems, and I understand how their reluctance to engage with the Department and their mistrust of it has developed over the years as it has repeatedly tried and failed to find a solution to the issue.

Members should note that the Department's new and revised processes place the onus directly on farmers to carefully check their new maps, to identify any errors and to inform DARD. Any potential errors may still be of the Department's making and could result in farmers once again facing heavy retrospective fines. The Department has not yet arrived at a solution that delivers a wholly accurate mapping system to allow it to correctly manage single farm payments.

Despite working on this issue since 2006, with the secondment of 60 staff from the Planning Service, the Department, through its new land parcel identification system, has yet to find a full and penalty-free solution to this issue. We have now heard that it may be 2013, if not later, before DARD's maps are totally accurate in the eyes of the EU. I urge this Sinn Féin Minister to do what the previous Minister could not: forge a solution to this long-running failure and put an end, once and for all, to the heavy fines being levied on hard-pressed farmers and the Executive.

When the Minister makes her statement next week, I urge her to give a full and frank assessment of the scale of the fines that the Executive are facing. I also ask her to bring clarity to this issue to ensure that we never

again face mounting fines of this scale and nature. The Minister must also identify the financial scale and potential impact of any future disallowances that we expect to cover at the expense of other investments. I support the motion, and I await with interest the Minister's statement.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas le moltóirí an rúin seo. I thank the proposer of the motion, the Chairperson of the Committee, for bringing this very important issue to our attention.

In support of the motion, the simple fact is that the mapping errors came about because our farmers trusted DARD. They had no reason to question the accuracy of what the Department had told them about the measurements of their fields and holdings, and it was from those DARD-supplied maps that the farmers obtained the acreage that they copied to their first single farm payment application forms. There may have been some inaccuracies at the time, and I am not questioning that. However, I do not agree that farmers should be punished for those original mistakes. I also accept that there is an onus on farmers to ensure that the maps are accurate, but we must get real in some of these instances. Farmers simply do not have the technical instruments required to measure land or fractions of land nor do they have access to the information that satellites provide. DARD officials do have that information; they are provided with apparatus, which, I might add, is paid for by farm-owning taxpayers and which can provide the details and the minute measurements.

Potentially, the fines could top £100 million. We have heard that the Department has accumulated £64 million in fines over a three-period from 2005, and amid fears that they will impose a further £45 million of fines, EU auditors are now looking at the three most recent years. However, the Department has told us that a proactive approach has been taken, and although we are facing fines, the Minister has said that £82 million has been set aside to date. Mrs Dobson correctly asked where that money has come from. Is that money that would have been spent, as she said, on fuel-poverty measures or on our health service? Where would that money have otherwise been spent? Could it have been spent by the Department on flood alleviation schemes or on decentralisation projects that could have benefitted our respective constituencies?

The Chairperson referred to the C&AG report, and I remember sitting in when that report was debated. The report said that £19·4 million had been set aside by the Department, and it suggested that those moneys had not been properly applied for and had been set aside for purposes for which they were not intended. What will be the effect of those fines and the setting aside of moneys to pay for them?

The Minister went on to say that her Department was working proactively. It is unfortunate that the current Minister is not here to provide the detail of how the decision is to be challenged in the courts, but I look forward to the junior Minister telling us what legal clarity has been provided to date. The Department states that it is seeking legal clarity and, indeed, that it is regularly in contact with the European Commission. Those of us seeking to deal with the issue, and who are debating those matters today, are anxious to hear from the Minister what the European Commission is saying about them and what points she has sought to clarify.

If it is the case that the Minister and her Department are proactively addressing the issue, it is surprising that she has appeared to have inherited this whole matter from her predecessor, Minister Gildernew. We want a retrospective account of the proactivity that has taken place. In other words, what has been happening at the Department over the past years if it is only now starting to be proactive? We, the taxpayers and the farmers, will be made to pay the bill for this. Faced with the situation, what did the previous Minister do to resolve it during her tenure? If she has left the issue as a legacy for the current Minister, in what way are we trying to get through it? Other than the occasional media sound bite on the matter, there has been a distinct lack of clarity.

To pursue a legal challenge can also be costly. What stage are legal proceedings at? As I stated previously, I require the Minister to update us on those legal proceedings, legal advice and the degree to which she is bring proactive on them, given that there have been quite a number of years to deal with such matters. At the end of the day, we want to hear how this situation has come about.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will you draw your remarks to a close, please?

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat. We want to know how this situation has come about and the practical detail of how it will be resolved.

Mr McCarthy: I declare an interest as a recipient of the single farm payment. Like other Members, I am extremely disappointed that the Minister is not with us in the Chamber to hear our debate and to answer some pertinent questions. I welcome the presence of junior Minister Martina Anderson, but she will not answer our questions. She will simply stand up to read a prepared script. It will be a very welcome surprise if she can go further than that. I understand, however, that the Agriculture and Rural Development Minister will make a statement on the subject of this debate to the Assembly a week today. Given the fact that she will be a week behind, and knowing our concern, the Minister will have a chance not merely to make a statement but to give real answers to the real questions that we will raise here today.

The Chair of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and others have adequately covered the concerns of Members and expressed the absolute seriousness of this entire debacle. I call it that because it seems to me that, as time goes on, the demand from Europe grows bigger. I simply ask: when is it going to stop? Listeners to the debate will be forgiven for being completely confused by the millions of euro that we are talking about — a million here, four million there, 30 million somewhere else, and it goes on and on.

I understand that this disallowance saga started in January 2010. It started before then, but we were notified in January 2010 of a demand for the repayment — and here I go with more millions — of €34·45 million. On 15 July, the European Commission issued a further list of financial corrections amounting to €33·7 million. That brings us up to €68·15 million. We now face a possible further €45 million fine, which will bring the total to well over €110 million. That is outrageous. It is horrendous. In anybody's language, such figures are shocking. As the motion reflects, the question is how did we get into this mess in the first place. When will that money be repaid, and, as others have asked, where will the £100 million come from?

1.15 pm

In a statement to the 'Belfast Telegraph' on 9 November, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development stated:

> *"To date we have set aside £82m"*

— to which Patsy McGlone referred —

> *"to deal with the fines up until 2009. None of that money has come out of any frontline service or any department budget."*

She also said that court action had been launched to challenge the fines, along with a massive operation to remap some 50,000 fields. Where will that £82 million come from?

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that he will keep me right on this. As I recall, DARD officials informed the Committee that the money to repay the fines would come out of non-spend in the monitoring rounds. That is what I heard them say.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for her intervention. Regardless of whether it comes out of non-spend or spend, £82 million will have to come out of somewhere. If it comes out of the Northern Ireland Budget, £82 million that have could be used in loads of other areas will be lost. Northern Ireland simply cannot afford to lose that amount of cash. We all know of many important outstanding local projects that could make good use of even a small proportion of that money.

In conclusion, the ordinary man and woman in Northern Ireland, on hearing of the huge fine, will simply ask why and how those huge errors happened in the first place? Who was responsible and why has no one or no departmental official been apprehended? Could the situation not have been avoided by catching on to what was happening before the auditors in Brussels were forced to impose such colossal fines on Northern Ireland? It most certainly should never happen again. I fully support the motion.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to comment on a very important issue for the farming community in Northern Ireland. I declare an interest in the matter as a farmer who receives a single farm payment. In my opinion, the issue goes right to the heart of the Department's administration of the single farm payment since its inception in 2005. Mapping inspections and the unacceptably long wait for payments are a never-ending nightmare for farmers. I have lost count of the number of times that I have raised those issues with the Department. Yet, it seems that the process grinds ever slower, no matter how many times the issue is raised or how many promises are made about speeding it up.

From speaking to sources in the Department, I am aware of the fact that that part of DARD's administration simply is not working. I believe that it is incapable of dealing with the tasks set before it; I do not use those words lightly. I am aware of inspections that were carried out early in the summer that have not yet been entered into the system, even though it is now mid-November. That is an unacceptable situation, and one that the Minister must address immediately. The farming industry is under enough pressure as it is. A message must be registered with the Minister and the Department that every week a payment is delayed is a week of uncertainty for the farmer concerned. The fact that fines are being imposed should not, I feel, reflect poorly on the farming community, which is weighed down with mountains of form filling, red tape and administration, on top of having to manage its animals and crops.

I believe that, in the main, many of the discrepancies were small and the auditors were certainly nitpicking. Having said that, given that I, on behalf of scores of farmers, have had close dealings with the Department on the issue for a number of years, it really does not come as a surprise that we are facing fines potentially worth millions of pounds as a result of investigations by EC auditors. On the one hand, we have the ever-present overzealous hand of Europe, where there are elements of red tape, and on the other hand, we have a Department that remains ill-equipped to administer single farm payments.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not like his choice of language in saying that the Department is "ill-equipped". I think that it is too well-equipped. As a farmer, surely you accept that most of the farming community would say that the Department is more than well-equipped, given the ratio of officials to farmers. Given that mapping and the number of inspections that the farming community regularly tell us about are the problem, surely the responsibility and the embarrassment lie with departmental officials, and farmers have no hand at all in the issue.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I fully agree with him. That said, however, farmers will not allow themselves to be made scapegoats. That will not happen. As the Member said, the problem lies fairly and squarely with the Department and its lack of preparation in administering the system.

I will give an example. I know for a fact that, some weeks ago, up to 18 members of Veterinary Service staff were transferred to undertake inspections for single farm payments, and they took a training course that lasted a number of weeks. Some 13 or 14 of them had not done four days' work on single farm payments when they were called back to the Veterinary Service. That whole process of training was a total waste of time as far as DARD was concerned.

The motion refers to how the moneys will be paid and by whom. I am sure that no one in the House today thinks that the agriculture industry should shoulder the burden of the repayments. That would not sit well with the industry.

I will be interested to hear the Minister's response, and it is frustrating that she is not in the House today to answer these important questions. The Minister has notified the House that she will respond on 21 November. I look forward to hearing about her plans to address these important matters. Fines are a large issue, but we need real and immediate action by the Minister to ensure that the system is fit for purpose so that further corrections can be avoided.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. At an Agriculture Committee meeting, my party colleagues and I argued against the motion being tabled for today; other Committee members are aware of that. I am, therefore, at a loss to understand why the Alliance Party Member is irate at the Minister not being present today, when he was told that she would not be here today but would be on 21 November. I wonder which meeting the Member was at if he is irate today but was not irate at the Committee meeting.

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr McMullan: No, I will not give way. I am only up on my feet.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member give way? Will the Member allow a body to reply?

Mr McMullan: No, I will not give way.

The last Member who spoke mentioned his disappointment at the Minister not being here. However, let us be quite clear: the Agriculture Committee knew that the Minister would not be here today. Indeed, I welcome the Chairman's comment, made with the backing of the

Committee, welcoming the Minister being in Europe today, because she is negotiating on fisheries and CAP reform, which is what we want her to do. The debate is turning into finger pointing and speculation, so let us put that issue to bed.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member give way?

Mr McMullan: No, I will not give way. Please give my head peace.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. When it is obvious that a Member will not give way, no Member should persist. Continue.

Mr McMullan: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. In my view, there are two possible reasons for the situation. We must look back to 2005 and ask what and who started all this. There is no point in people shrugging their shoulders and scratching their heads about who started all this. We need to find out who in DARD knew the full extent of the issue. If something in DARD needs to be looked at, let us look at it. *[Interruption.]* The Member should not point; it is bad manners to point.

We must find out who in DARD introduced this situation and who knew its full extent. We do know that it was only in 2008 that the full extent of it was pushed to the Minister's door. We all agree that the fines from the Commission are far too high.

At present, we have money set aside to pay £80·6 million, £82 million or whatever the figure is. This is where the alarmism comes in. We hear speculation about £120 million or £130 million. Some of the words that were used here this morning were "could", "might", "unfortunate" and "possible". There was not one word of assurance. We are dealing with speculation. We know that there are fines to pay, but we do not know how much is going to be paid for 2009 and 2010. I hope Members agree that that is all speculative. We heard one of the MEPs on television yesterday going down the same line. We need to be a united Assembly on this issue. If we want the Minister to negotiate these fines, we must be totally behind her, otherwise it sends the wrong message to Europe. These speculative figures give the farming community a bad name.

Members, I would like you all to agree that we have to find out what happened here, and we have to fix it so that it does not happen again. I totally agree with that.

Mr Buchanan: I support the motion. It is regrettable that this Assembly is debating an issue that could see anything up to £100 million in disallowances being paid back to Europe. I have no doubt, as I listen to the debate, that the concern is the detrimental impact that that payback will have on the Executive Budget. It is unfortunate that the Minister, as other folk have said, is not in the House today to answer some of the questions that are being put to her.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not like to correct him, but he was not at the Committee last week when the discussion took place. There was consensus that what the Minister has to do this week is extremely important for the whole agriculture sector. I defend the Minister on that issue; record that if you wish. That is the first point.

The thing that annoys most of us about this — and I am sure that, as a member of the Agriculture Committee, you will agree — is that if this debate had not been tabled in the first place, there never would have been a statement from the Minister. You will accept that this is not a new issue. This problem has been around for months if not years, as we are now hearing. The only thing that triggered the Minister to make a statement next week was the fact that the Committee pushed to have this debate.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Member for his intervention; he is absolutely right. It is an issue that has been rumbling on for a number of years, and had the Committee not taken the initiative to push the Minister and bring a motion before the House today, it would have continued to rumble on and the Minister would not have set aside time next week to come before the House to make a statement.

I am sure that we are all aware that it was small technical discrepancies that led to the huge disallowance, and therefore it is imperative that a proper system is put in place now to minimise or to eradicate any future risk of financial corrections being levied against the Department.

This motion has not been brought to the House by the Agriculture Committee to embarrass or to criticise the Department, but the reality is that the Department must shoulder some of the criticism, some of the responsibility and

some of the blame for the situation that we find ourselves in. As I said earlier, this is a matter that has been rumbling on for some considerable time, with the magnitude of disallowance increasing year on year. It is only right and proper that questions are asked of the Department and the Minister on this matter. Why were officials not up to speed with the proper regulations on the delivery of the single farm payment? Is it the case that farmers were not provided with the correct information from the inception of the single farm payment?

The continual drip feed of information to the farming community over the years has contributed to the entire mess. We heard earlier in the debate about the situation with the mapping system for farmers and the whole debacle around that.

However, one of the more pressing issues is the extent of engagement that the current Minister and her predecessor have had with the European Commission in lobbying and negotiating to have the level of disallowance reduced or perhaps completely eradicated. It appears that any engagement or negotiations to date have proved fruitless because the penalties have continued to increase. That is one reason why it is important that the Minister comes before the House and makes a clear and concise statement on this issue.

1.30 pm

I know that the Department can and probably will point the finger at other countries on which penalties have been imposed and seek to justify its position in that way and satisfy itself that we are not alone in this situation. Irrespective of the situation other countries find themselves in, the reality is that this Assembly is faced with paying back up to £100 million to Europe. That money would have made a huge difference to our economy in Northern Ireland at this time. Other Members have talked about the difference that it could make in other Departments, and considering the difference that a small amount of that money could make to the agrifood industry, it behoves each of us to ensure that the Minister takes our position seriously, looks at this matter and sets in motion something that will rectify the situation and make sure that it does not happen again.

The Minister must now make a clear statement to the Assembly providing clarity on the severity of the financial contributions. In doing so, it is important that she defines how much is for fines and how much is for penalties.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Buchanan: As well as that, she must take action to address the issue of non-compliance in the future.

Mr Swann: A clear message from this debate to the general public, and the media in particular, is that the farming community and the farmers themselves are not solely responsible for the fines that are being delivered from Europe. A bad misconception is being put out there that mismanagement of EU funding by farmers has caused the fines. So, we need to ask how this has been allowed to happen.

The motion addresses the issue of non-compliance to ensure that fines will not be a recurring theme, but the Commission has already advised that further disallowances for the scheme years 2007, 2008 and 2009 are likely. So this predates our current Minister coming into office, and I acknowledge that she is in Brussels today doing very good work on behalf of the agriculture industry, and I acknowledge that we were aware of that fact in the Committee. Although it predates the current Minister, it does not predate the current departmental officials, and we need to look there if we want to apportion blame or look for answers. In their report, the European Commission auditors identified weaknesses in the way that DARD administered the EU funding schemes. Ladies and gentlemen, there are enough DARD officials, but maybe they are not in the right jobs. Maybe they should be out in the fields and the farmyards, not sitting behind desks dreaming up more schemes and how to implement them.

Last week, a senior official from the Department told the Committee that the penalties in relation to countryside management inspections were due to overzealous inspectors who had given some farmers two weeks to rectify problems but later had to withdraw that instruction because the rectifying of those problems, such as planting trees in the middle of November within two weeks, would have gone against good guidance and common practice.

DARD has a lot to answer for. Mr Murphy said earlier that the Department knew in 2005 that EU funding schemes were changing, and I do

not believe that DARD was in a position to administer a new scheme. It is unfair. Officials need further, better training in order to know how to implement those schemes on the ground.

I can cite one example that has been brought to my constituency office. It relates to field boundary restoration work under the countryside management scheme. In the DARD guidance booklet, there is a simple question on how far apart two fence posts need to be in order to meet EU compliance. That is not rocket science. In a single DARD information booklet, however, there are three different regulations as to how far apart those two posts should be. One diagram states that they must be 2·7 metres apart from edge to edge. The written instructions state 2·7 metres from centre to centre. It also states that one can comply with British standard 1722, which allows 3 metres from centre to centre. Therefore, if the Department's instructions, which it puts in its pamphlets to guide its inspectors, are complicated, an inspector who goes out onto a farm with a measuring tape will not be able to comply with that guidance no matter what measurement he gets, because he will not know what he is supposed to comply with.

I believe that Mr McGlone referred to the mapping issue. Again, DARD states in guidance on its own website:

> *"To improve on-the-spot checks ortho-photography has been available to inspectors since 2008 and by 2009 all inspections were supported by ortho-photography to ensure that the standard required by the Regulations is observed."*

Inspectors still go out onto farms with plastic wheels to measure farm lengths, fences, gates and hedgerows. Therefore, as Patsy said earlier, if DARD inspectors do not have confidence in the ortho-photography maps that have been given as good guidance, what reassurance do farmers have?

The countryside management scheme and delivery of EU funding programmes have been a steep learning curve. DARD has been doing it since 2005. I would have hoped that it would have got there by now. We talk about future fines that are coming. What concerns me is that we are looking at further greening under the next CAP review. If DARD is not getting it right now, after six years, the Assembly has a lot to worry about and the farming industry has a lot to fear.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's motion does not portray some DARD officials as being at all effective and competent.

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

Mr Swann: I hope that, on her return from Brussels, the Minister will show not only that she is fit to challenge officials there but that she has the ability and strength to challenge her officials in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. I can assure her that if she does not, the Ulster Unionist members of the Committee will.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will touch briefly upon the need for the debate, as other Members have done. It is an important debate. Differences of opinion related to when it would happen. The motion calls for the Minister to come to the Floor of the Assembly to give a clear statement on the issue. The Committee was made well aware that the Minister would give that statement next Monday. Sinn Féin would have preferred to have seen or heard the Minister's statement first, and if the Assembly still felt that a debate were needed, it would have had the debate then.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member give way?

Mr W Clarke: I will in a minute.

Earlier, Mr McCarthy said that he was confused and concerned about why the Minister was not in the House, yet he sat in the Committee and agreed that the debate should go ahead even if no Minister were present. I welcome that junior Minister Anderson is here. It could have ended up like the Peter Hain Assembly: we would be sitting here waffling to ourselves. The Member agreed that the Minister's important business in Brussels would take precedence, and rightly so.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. Week after week, a lot of waffling goes on in the Chamber. Nothing constructive comes out of it. I welcome the work that I hope the Minister is doing in Brussels on behalf of the agricultural community. She will have a week to familiarise herself with all the concerns of Members on this side of the House. There do not seem to be many concerns on that side of the House.

Brother McMullan mentioned the £82 million and waffled it to the side. Does Brother Clarke not agree that the Minister will have an extra

week in which to come back to the Chamber to answer the questions to the best of her ability and to satisfy not only us but the people in the community who want to know where the £100 million to pay back Brussels is going to come from? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to address other Members by their proper names. Those other terms may be for another place.

Mr W Clarke: I share the Member's concerns. At the end of the day, we are talking about public money; taxpayers' money not just farmers' money, and we all have a concern. We want to get a solution, and we need to move forward. That is what Members on these Benches are talking about. We need clear answers, and we need to know how we move forward to eradicate this problem for future years. With regard to who is going to give you the answers, Sister Anderson will do that.

This is a legacy issue, and, as I said, the ball was dropped under direct rule. This issue was lost under the Hain Assembly. There is a clear need to all work together to send out a clear message that we will resolve this problem and that we will look at the land mapping issue, which is of the utmost importance when the European Commission is looking for the answers.

For too long, DARD, or whoever, allowed certain aspects of farm mapping, such as laneways, gorse, scrubland, rivers and planning sites, to stay within farmers' farm maps. Planning applications were passed for numerous sites on land, and farmers continued to claim single farm payment on that. However, I do not think that that was totally the farmers' responsibility. In my opinion, the Department was not robust enough in dealing with that issue. However, we are where we are. We need to move on, and as the Member across the way said, CAP reform is upon us. There are many elements to CAP reform, including a change in the system from a single farm payment to multi-payments. It is important that we have a robust system for mapping, because there are extra responsibilities on the way, such as greening payments and young farmers' payments. Therefore, it is very important that we have in place a robust management system.

I am confident that we are working away towards that. As you can imagine, about 750,000 fields need to be accurately mapped. That is a considerable amount of work. People have said that the Department had a considerable amount of time, and I agree with them. It should have been more in the Department's thinking to get the task done urgently. It is not about dragging your feet, burying your head in the sand and thinking that the EU will not see it. As others have pointed out, the issues are the same throughout Europe. In Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Holland, the UK and Italy, they are being asked to pay up to €60 million. I support the motion.

Mr Allister: Undoubtedly, this is an important issue for now and for the future. I have three points to make about the EU's role, and I will then say something about DARD. First, I find it pretty rich that an organisation whose accounts have been in such a shambles that they have not been able to be signed off by the auditor for 15 years should be the body that is pointing the finger and raising issues with member states. If it had put its house in order long since, it would be coming to this matter with much cleaner hands. Secondly, there has been inordinate delay in the auditory processes of the EU, which creates its own problems and is a contributor to the fact that this has become a protracted issue.

It is within that window that I have some sympathy for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development here in Northern Ireland, because, as I understand it, whatever the signs in the wind were, it was not until 2010 that definitive findings indicated flaws and difficulties in 2004, 2005 and 2006. It was not until September 2011 that we had an indication of further problems up to 2007. It was that time lag of many years that, undoubtedly, made it very difficult for the Department to get ahead of the system and put in order what had been found to be wrong. In part, that is why there has been a delay in putting things right. The auditory process of the EU contributed to the difficulties that we are in now.

1.45 pm

The third point that I want to make about the EU is that it is quite clear that what we loosely call fines are grossly disproportionate to the mischief found. I am sure that that will be an aspect of the case that is before the European Court of Justice. Sadly, of course, given the speed at which the European Court works, we are probably looking at another two years before we get a judgement. In the meantime, we have

yet to find out what flaws the EU will find for 2008, 2009, 2010 and this year.

I will now discuss some of the issues that arise. The Chairman of the Committee spoke about money having to be paid back in fines, etc. Perhaps we have all spoken in those terms, but my understanding is that money is not actually paid back but is now held back by Brussels in respect of other area payments to make up the shortfall. If that is confirmed, may we be told whether that has already happened? As and when it does happen, where will the shortfall that it creates be made up from? How, in resource and capital terms, will that shortfall, which might amount to £100 million, be met? Perhaps the Department will consider, as a gesture of its regret about how it has handled the issue, forgoing the largesse that it intends bestowing on itself for new headquarters. That might be a suitably contrite contribution from the Department, given the mess that we are in over fines.

There are key questions. It is also regrettable that the Minister seems to lack the vision and enthusiasm to tackle some of those issues. I received a written answer from the Minister to my question about the latest tranche of £4 million of clawback. She states:

> *"My Department is considering if there is merit in contesting this disallowance. However, there are likely to be significant practical difficulties in doing so as the onus will be on my Department to demonstrate that the Commission has either been manifestly unreasonable in its approach or has erred in its interpretation of EU legislation. This is much more difficult".*

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

Mr McCarthy: The Member asks a very important question. The Minister clearly stated:

> *"To date we have set aside £82m to deal with the fines up until 2009".*

Does that not indicate that the Minister is not waiting for money to be withheld by Europe but has £82 million sitting somewhere, ready to hand over?

Mr Allister: I trust that it is not end-of-year funding or we will lose it. I am puzzled about whether, if there is a legal challenge before the court, that has frozen the demand, or whether there will be a clawback in the meantime, despite the ongoing legal proceedings before the European Court. We need clarity on that. I doubt that we will get it today, nor would we have got it if the Minister had been here, because, frankly, she does not have a grasp of her brief at all, and we would have had read out to us what has been presented by the officials. Legions of questions need answers, and the sooner they are answered, the better.

Ms M Anderson (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat. As a Minister who is very much on top of her brief, the Minister of Agriculture, Michelle O'Neill, welcomes this debate and regrets very much that she is unable to attend today. As Members will be aware, Minister O'Neill is in Brussels today, representing our interests at the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council. She is holding discussions with the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development on the recently announced legislative proposals for the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Minister O'Neill recognises Members' concerns on this issue; she has already declared her intent to make a statement on disallowance and compliance matters to the Assembly. I will address some of the concerns that were expressed in the House. The Minister's intent to make that statement did not follow the motion being listed. In fact, it was the other way round: the Minister's intent to make a statement to the House on 21 November was listed in advance of the motion being tabled. Of course, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development is entitled to select whatever motions it brings to the Chamber. The Minister is now scheduled to make her statement on Monday 21 November. In it, she will provide an update on disallowance to date, the concerns identified by the Commission and the action being taken by DARD to address those, along with a timetable for implementation.

As someone relatively new to this subject, I have been listening intently to the points raised and welcome all the information that the debate has generated. Junior Minister Bell and I have responsibility for EU matters in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. However, that might be stretching the point. I understand that this is not the first debate on single farm payments. Indeed, my party colleague, the then Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle Gildernew MP MLA, made a statement on the disallowance of single farm payments

to the Assembly on Monday 27 September 2010. In her statement, Ms Gildernew advised Members that DARD distributes about £300 million of EU money each year across the agriculture industry. To get that money, DARD and those claiming it sign up to a body of EU rules that place onerous requirements on both parties. Ms Gildernew also advised Members of the various audits undertaken by the Commission and the European Court of Auditors from 2006 to date and their likely outcomes.

The recently published disallowance was among those mentioned. Although, at the time, the total known potential disallowance amounted to approximately €72 million or £64 million, it was noted that further corrections for 2009 and later years could not be ruled out. It was highlighted that DARD was working to mitigate that, but to cover contingencies, budget provision of a further £40 million was being sought. Jo-Anne Dobson wanted to know whether the money had already been set aside. Without pre-empting Minister O'Neill's statement, I would like to advise that, as at 31 March 2011, DARD has accrued liability of £64·9 million in its audited resource accounts, in addition to £11·2 million held for it by DEFRA. That amounts to £80·6 million.

Kieran McCarthy, Patsy McGlone and Jim Allister also asked where the money was coming from. In accruing the money, DARD has funded most of the actual and proposed disallowances that arose during the 2004-09 scheme years. That has been achieved, with DFP approval, out of end-year underspends from other Departments. In the main, those underspends would have been lost to our block.

Although that alleviates some of the financial pressures, it does not take account of any disallowance that might be applied for the 2010 year and further scheme years. DARD cannot rule out the possibility of further disallowances in years to come. However, at this point, any figure quoted would be speculative. There is still considerable scope for challenge and, indeed, for ongoing improvements in compliance, which would mitigate further disallowance.

I will clarify that as far as the handling arrangements are concerned, DARD does not pay the money back to the Commission, nor can it recoup it from the money that was paid to farm businesses, unless, of course, there has been an overpayment due to scheme non-compliance on the part of the farmer. However, at some point, the Commission will deduct those disallowance amounts that have been finalised and published from DARD's request for money to cover single farm payments that have been made. DARD will then be required to cover the shortfall. As I explained, DARD has accrued the money to do so for the key known disallowances that have arisen during the 2004-09 scheme years.

I want to make a correction, because I know that people are, rightly, very focused on the figures. I said £64·9 million by mistake. That should have been £69·4 million, so I stand corrected on that. I want Members to take note of that in case there is any concern.

In looking at who is responsible, as Conor Murphy, Oliver McMullan and Willie Clarke said, many voices across Europe have been arguing that the Commission has been somewhat heavy-handed in all this. It is notable that many of the member states affected are not naturally regarded as countries that are lax in their controls. Tom Buchanan asked about negotiations with the EU. It is probably correct to say that DARD overestimated the scope to persuade the Commission to reduce disallowance.

It is easy for some to seek to blame the farmers, and it has been mentioned today that there are some concerns that that has been the case in some of the commentary that has been made outside. However, that is to miss the complexities of the controls that are bearing down on the farming community as a result of the Commission's requirements.

Of course, where individual farmers have breached scheme rules, I know that DARD will seek to apply the rules strictly. It has been expending considerable resources in getting the message to farmers that they must claim only on eligible areas. Ultimately, however, we and many member state paying agencies have had to realise that although we firmly believe that the Commission's approach is heavy-handed and disproportionate, the best way to minimise the disallowance being applied is to satisfy the Commission that its concerns have been met.

Paul Frew, the Chair of the Agriculture Committee, Conor Murphy, Robin Swann, Willie Clarke and others asked about the measures that will be put in place to improve the farm maps.

A top priority in that regard relates to updating and improving farm maps in close collaboration

with Land and Property Services, and the Agriculture Minister will have more to say on that when she comes to the Chamber next week.

2.00 pm

From the first audit in 2006, DARD moved to challenge the Commission on its findings in some areas while improving its systems and processes in others. DARD will continue to challenge where it has reason to believe that it is appropriate to do so. It has taken a case to the European Court on a technical issue arising from the 2006 audit. Although that is likely to take time to progress, I am sure that Members will agree that, if DARD has been advised that there is a reasonable chance of success, it should continue with the case. As far as improving its systems and processes is concerned, DARD has already made improvements to on-farm inspections. It now uses aerial photography, and it made those photographs available to single-application claimants earlier this year.

I hope that I have provided some clarification and addressed some of the points made during the debate. As stated at the outset, Minister O'Neill will provide more details on the matter in her statement next Monday. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank all Members who contributed to this important debate. I also thank junior Minister Anderson for replying and responding as best she could to some of the concerns raised during the debate. It is important to note that, in his opening remarks, the Chairperson put on record the Committee's appreciation of the fact that the Minister is on departmental business trying to represent the fishing industry in the North on the quota. We wish her every success. The last time that the EU gave any improvement to the North on the fishing quota, it was Minister Bríd Rodgers who, as Agriculture Minister, secured that improvement. Unfortunately, we have not had any improvement since, but, nonetheless, we wish Minister O'Neill well in her endeavours.

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

A number of Members highlighted correctly not only the concerns of the Committee but those felt across the agricultural and rural community about the impact that the fines and disallowances would have on our lives. Members wanted greater clarity on the shortfall, not only about how it was to be made up but about what detriment, if any, it would have for the plans of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in areas such as tackling rural poverty and dealing with rural childcare. We would like to know whether the disallowances and fines have had any negative impact on moneys earmarked in the past to tackle those problems. I do not see how any Department or Executive could sustain such a loss to their budget without that having a detrimental impact across a wide range of other departmental responsibilities.

In the Chairperson's opening remarks, he mentioned the recent history and the Committee's interest in the issue. Following the elections in May, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development was reconstituted with some new faces as well as some stalwarts of the previous Committee. In those early days, the new Committee was briefed on a range of key issues by the Minister and her officials. We heard about the historical legacy around disallowance and the focus on getting new maps. However, I, for one, was disappointed that, when the latest announcement about a further £4 million in disallowances was made, I only came to know about it through the media rather than through any of the briefings by departmental officials. I do not know whether those officials were as surprised as me; maybe they hoped that the Committee might miss that point.

It was at a recent meeting of the Committee, as I think the Chairperson indicated, that we learned of the additional £15 million year-on-year potential disallowance, which, as I believe the Chairperson highlighted, was an estimate based on a range of possible disallowances. It is because of the uncertainty around the situation that the Committee wished to have this debate.

I know that many Members from across the parties referred to the Minister's intended statement next week. We certainly look forward to that, and she will certainly be better briefed on the concerns that Members articulated this afternoon and, hopefully, will give a very full response. As Members will know, there is limited opportunity with a ministerial statement to question the Minister on what she has said to the House. Therefore, it was important to have this debate, so that the whole range of concerns were given a full hearing. Junior Minister Anderson responded as best she could

and gave answers to some of the concerns raised. However, we look forward to what Minister O'Neill has to say next week.

Mr McCarthy: The motion asks:

> *"how, when and by whom these moneys will be repaid."*

Although I pay tribute to the junior Minister for being slotted in at very short notice, those three important aspects of the debate simply have not been answered. Until they are answered, I, as a Committee member, will not be satisfied.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you for that intervention. I come now to Members' remarks. Mr Allister stated that the audit procedures in the EU were an explanation of why we are so far behind. However, with regard to the who, what and where, some Members referred to it being a legacy issue that came under direct rule. I think that Mr McMullan referred to the waffle that prevailed in the Chamber at times today. Mind you, I suspect that some of that waffle was due to the absence of any Executive business. The simple fact of the matter is that we do not yet know because there is a drip-feed of information on the amounts of money involved. These are telephone number amounts of money. They are huge sums, and there were concerns that some of the money was being held back in monitoring rounds and then handed back over. However, as I understand it, the way the Executive approach their accounting mechanisms means that each Department is encouraged to overbid for the money it may be able to spend in any given time frame. So, the ability to have money set aside will be reduced substantially as Departments deliver on their projected spends. The Committee had concerns about whether that was good government.

Mr Murphy set out the timescale and some of the legacy issues around how this situation came about. That tied in somewhat with Mr McMullan's reference to the Hain Assembly and the waffle that pertained at that time. Nonetheless, as other Members pointed out, since 2008 it has been the responsibility of Ministers here to get a handle on that. Many Members are not yet convinced that that has been achieved, particularly as we see the sum of money that we have to pay back growing. There is a lack of confidence among the farming community and concern that they are being made to pay the price. Mrs Dobson, for example, made it clear that the farmers used in good faith the maps that the Department supplied, and Mr McGlone said something similar. We know that it was up to the farmers to double-check those maps to some degree, but they relied on the technology that was available to DARD and thus used the maps in good faith.

Other Members raised issues around the level of disallowance and around money having to be repaid by some farmers. There is a lack of evidence where the evidential route is: it was based on maps that went back some time, and we all know how climate change has affected a number of farms, over the past couple of years in particular. If an aerial photograph is taken in November, potentially after torrential rain, it will look different to an aerial photograph of the same place taken in May. That is not necessarily the type of evidence that one would expect to be used in the modern age.

Mr Swann talked about the technology being available but questioned whether inspectors are up to speed on the use of that new technology. Other Members — Mr Buchanan and Mr Clarke in his intervention — talked about the number of inspectors per farm, saying that there were more inspectors than there were farms. However, Members are concerned that the inspectors are not trained well enough —

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

Mrs D Kelly: We have not yet heard that from the Minister.

I thank all Members who contributed. I am sorry that I did not get to refer to all Members' contributions. This is a matter of huge concern, and we look forward to the Minister's statement next week.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes the latest announcement by the European Commission on financial corrections to be levied against the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development; expresses concern about the potential effect on the Executive's Budget; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make a full and urgent report to the Assembly on the extent of the financial corrections, the actions she is taking to address the issue of non-compliance and how, when and by whom these moneys will be repaid.*

Private Members' Business

Smoking in Cars Carrying Children

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

Mr McCallister: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly recognises the damaging effects of passive smoking; notes that children are particularly exposed to second-hand smoke; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work closely with the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation, in association with a public awareness campaign, to ban smoking in cars carrying passengers under the age of 16.*

I am grateful to Members who will participate in the debate. My party and I believe that this is an important debate. There has been some suggestion that debates such as this are not relevant for the Assembly when there are pressing issues to do with the economy. To me, it is very relevant that we debate this type of public health issue.

Smoking kills more people in Northern Ireland than drugs, alcohol, obesity and car accidents combined, so it is right and proper that the Assembly take the issue very seriously and have this debate. We must try to move forward and determine how we will address the scourge of smoking and particularly the exposure of young children to second-hand smoke.

There are several strands to the debate. The long-established health risks from smoking have been well known for many years. It has also been known for a long number of years the extra harm that smoke does to a young body that is still developing as opposed to the harm that it does to an adult. That is why the motion is very relevant and why it is crucial that we have the debate. Smoke and the diseases that it can cause and make children more susceptible to are seriously harmful, as is the cost, not only the financial cost to our health service but the cost to individuals who will struggle with health problems for the rest of their life. In many cases, their life expectancy is cut short. It is well known that children who are exposed to second-hand smoke in cars or see a parent smoking regularly are much more likely to become smokers themselves. That is something that we should and must address. Over a number of years, we have had some success in addressing the scourge of smoking through a tobacco strategy and looking at tobacco controls and associated issues, and we need to build on that. Too many smokers still act irresponsibly around young children.

2.15 pm

There are several areas that I want to examine. One of the main criticisms of this type of move is how it would be enforced. Most people are broadly in favour and supportive of it, but the big question is how it would be enforced. If we always considered that question, we might never legislate for anything. We need to work with the Departments of Health and Justice to examine what penalties there would be and how it would be enforced; that is where we have to begin. The police have said that they do not see a problem with enforcement. Looking at other issues that we have legislated on over the years such as seat belt wearing and car seats for young children, would anyone tell the Assembly that it has not made significant improvements to the safety of children and adults travelling in cars?

Mr B McCrea: On the point about enforcement, is the Member aware that 40% of drivers wore a seat belt before the seat belt law was passed but the figure rose to 90% once the law had been passed? A 1985 report estimated that those changes prevented 7,000 deaths or serious injuries and 13,000 slight casualties. Does he anticipate similar improvements if we could do something about the prevention of passive smoking?

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to my colleague for that point. Those are the types of argument that you hear when you want to legislate on something such as smoking in cars: that people act responsibly, that they would not do that and we should leave it up to the individual. Sometimes, the Government and the Assembly have to take that lead. We have to stand up and say that it is right that the Assembly legislate for this and it is right to send that very powerful message, as my colleague highlighted with the seat belt law. It is the same with seat belts and car safety seats for very young children. No one would dream now of bringing a baby home from hospital without having a proper car seat; in fact, I am not sure whether that is allowed. That is right and proper when you think

of the damage that can be caused. The same argument can apply to this.

In wanting to progress with a private Member's Bill, I approach the issue as someone who is broadly supportive of civil liberties. I do not like the idea of the nanny state. However, I do not think that it is right to say that we should not protect children who do not have a voice, such as a child of five years of age who does not know the risks of smoking and cannot tell a parent or adult that they should not smoke in the car in a confined space.

Some will ask what the point of the legislation is if we can ban smoking in the car but not in the home. The argument is that a car is a significantly smaller space than most people's home. I send out the message strongly from here that, if you are a smoker, go outside and smoke; do not inflict it on your children and other family members. People talk about drinking alcohol in the home, but there is not the danger of fumes coming from alcohol in the way that they do from cigarette smoke.

I am all for encouraging people to act responsibly and to take personal responsibility, but sometimes the Assembly and the Government have to take the lead, such as in the very good example that my colleague Mr McCrea quoted about seat belt wearing. I feel very strongly about this issue, and I have spoken to the Bill Office about progressing a private Member's Bill. I will be interested to hear the Minister's response. It is an issue that has to be dealt with and faced up to, and it is one that we should all act on. From speaking to colleagues, I believe that there is very broad support for the measure not only in the House but among the wider public, who are saying that it is sensible that we take the issue seriously, legislate on it and do something to protect children from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke. The consequences include an increase in infant sudden death syndrome, an increase in the risk of meningitis, respiratory problems and children going on to become smokers themselves. It is right and proper that we send out that message.

As I said, enforcement is not an issue. Think about the important public health message that it would send out. Think about what it would do for the Northern Ireland Public Health Agency's message on smoking and what it would say to people about the dangers of smoking. We do not want anyone to smoke; ideally, no one in our society would smoke. However, at least grown adults make a conscious decision. They make the decision knowing all the risk factors, having seen all the health warnings on cigarette packets and having heard all the issues that have been debated. They can still make a conscious decision, albeit the wrong one. Children do not have that choice. That decision is effectively taken away from them by others who act irresponsibly and put them in a position where they inhale second-hand smoke in a confined space. There is an idea that, if you put down the window, you somehow cleanse the inside of the car, but most of us know that the smell lasts for days. We really welcomed the ban on smoking in pubs, clubs and restaurants. Those who frequent such places know that it had a huge impact. I ask the Assembly to support the motion.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McCallister: I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I look forward to the debate on an important issue. I will bring forward a private Member's Bill if the Government do not legislate on the issue.

Mr Wells: It is good news that the honourable Member for South Down will bring forward a private Member's Bill, because he has a 100% success rate in that field.

Mr McCallister: Another press release.

Mr Wells: I hope that he will not quote me on that in the local press.

There have already been light-hearted aspects to this debate, but there is also a deadly serious aspect. According to a written answer given by the then Health Minister Mr McGimpsey, last year, 2,300 people in Northern Ireland died as a direct result of smoking. The vast majority of those people died of lung cancer. Lung cancer is one of the most horrible, excruciatingly painful and dreadful deaths that anyone can imagine. Two secretaries of mine died recently of lung cancer. Both had been heavy smokers. I worked with both of those people, and what they went through was absolutely dreadful. We are dealing with something that can lead to a lot of very horrible deaths.

The other statistic that people need to remember is that 81% of smokers want to give up. They

are desperate to give up. It is not a question of trying to force people to do something that they do not want to do. They want help to achieve their goal of being smoke-free. I am grateful to the Ulster Cancer Foundation for the stats, some of which are frightening. Each year, 300,000 children in the United Kingdom are referred to a GP as a result of the inhalation of tobacco smoke. That leads to 9,500 hospital visits per annum and a total cost to the National Health Service of £23·3 million. It is all so utterly needless.

I have no doubt that in today's debate you will get those who will say that this is a terrible infringement of civil liberties, that this is the nanny state and that we are almost into a Nazi-type situation of forcing people not to do what they wish to do. However, we have been here before. We have heard those arguments with regard to the banning of smoking in pubs and restaurants — one of the best things that ever happened in Northern Ireland and one that I enthusiastically supported. When the smoking ban was obeyed with very little difficulty in a spit-and-sawdust pub in the west of County Mayo in the Irish Republic, it gave the United Kingdom confidence to follow suit, and a ban has been introduced in the four countries. We have not needed squads of enforcement officers calling at pubs and restaurants throughout Northern Ireland to enforce the ban. There has been a 99% compliance rate, and it has been voluntary. Once the legislation was introduced, smokers respected it, and they have not been smoking in pubs and restaurants. Indeed, how often do any of us read in our local newspapers about any pub or restaurant being prosecuted for allowing smoking?

If the legislation is introduced, as I hope it will be, either through the Minister or through a private Member's Bill, I do not see police officers routinely stopping cars on motorways or dual carriageways to see whether there has been smoking or whether there is ash in the ashtray. It is more likely that large numbers of people will realise that it is illegal and will stop, and there will be enormous health benefits as a result. Equally, if someone is stopped for some other reason, perhaps for using a mobile phone or driving too fast, and the officer notices that he or she has been smoking, it may be added to the schedule of offences. However, I do not see it adding, to a huge degree, to the work of the Department of Justice and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

We owe it to our children. Another alarming statistic is that second-hand smoke levels in cars can be as high as 10 times the concentration considered to be unhealthy by the American Environmental Protection Agency. That is a shocking statistic. It is unacceptable that we expose children — even children who may be being driven home from a hospital's maternity ward — to that level of smoke. It must be stopped. I would welcome a ban, because I believe that we owe it to future generations.

All of this has a cost. We are in times of restricted budgets for the health service. Can we allow those who wish to give up smoking and need that impetus and encouragement to continue to add to the burden on our health service of having to treat the related conditions? The treatment is often very expensive and extremely serious. The sooner a ban is in place the better. I support the motion entirely.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Michelle Gildernew.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn and will require a written answer.

Budget: October Monitoring Round

1. **Mr McDevitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the unallocated moneys designated for the social protection fund, the social investment fund and the childcare strategy in the October monitoring round will be ring-fenced and allocated without further delay. (AQO 721/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): The social protection fund and the childcare fund will operate as Executive funds. They will require bids from other Departments and the subsequent allocation of funding to those Departments by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) on instruction from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). Spend from those funds is, therefore, dependent on Departments seeking the funding.

Our officials are working with other Departments to assess funding options and to identify potential initiatives, including how the social protection fund might assist, for example, those in fuel poverty. We are confident that the allocated budget for the social protection fund will be spent this year.

The social investment fund will operate as an OFMDFM-led fund, which requires full business case approval. We are working through all the necessary processes to make that fund operable without delay. The Member will be aware that the policy is out to consultation, which will end on 23 December. It is not possible to spend under the scheme until those processes are completed. Some £79 million of the £80 million fund will be allocated across years 2, 3 and 4 and, therefore, cannot be spent in this financial year.

The outcome of the public consultation will inform how the social investment fund will operate, including the arrangements for funding. However, we expect that successful projects will display a clear link to the fund's four strategic objectives: building pathways to employment; tackling the systemic issues linked to deprivation; increasing community services; and addressing dereliction. We plan to put proposals on the development of the childcare strategy to the Executive later this year.

We are committed to ensuring investment in childcare, including the provision of additional funding in the current year, and we will carefully consider re-profiling funding in years 2, 3 and 4 in response to departmental bids.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the First Minister for his reply. Given that the First Minister has now admitted that he has to surrender money from the social investment fund because of the delays in getting the fund off the ground —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask Members not to walk in front of another Member when he is on his feet.

Mr McDevitt: Will I start again, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker? I thank the First Minister for his reply.

Seriously, given that the First Minister has to surrender funds that had been earmarked against the social investment fund, due to the delay in getting it off the ground, will he give a commitment to the House that there will be no more deserving funds to which to allocate that available money than the childcare fund and the other funds mentioned in my question?

Mr P Robinson: Had bids for the childcare fund been made, I agree that that probably would be the case. We do not originate the schemes for the childcare funds; they come from the various Departments. Although initial consultation with the Departments indicated the amount that we should bid for, when we had the money and sought schemes, they did not come forward to the extent that we needed additional money for them. As is the case with any other money not used in the financial year, it goes to the centre. It will be up to each Department to make bids for the money and the Executive to decide the most appropriate use for it.

Mr Spratt: Does the First Minister agree that educational initiatives that tackle low level

educational achievement and aspiration, particularly in failing groups such as young Protestant males, could get funding under the social investment fund?

Mr P Robinson: I outlined in my answer to the question from the Member for South Belfast the four main themes that the social investment fund is intended to assist. It will be up to each of the zones to determine the priorities within their area, but in the consultation document, we gave a very clear lead on the underachievement in education and the lack of ambition in many parts of the community. The House is well aware that that is seen in urban Protestant males in particular. I hope that the proposals will come forward from each of the areas to address that clear need.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. The funds that the First Minister mentioned in his answer are all intended to address poverty and inequality. What, in his view, will be the likely impact on child poverty of the coalition Government's welfare reform agenda, specifically as it relates to child tax credits and child benefit?

Mr P Robinson: I do not want to steal the thunder of my colleague, who will answer a later question on child poverty. However, it goes without saying that if there are reductions in the amounts that are available under so-called welfare reform, it will have a detrimental impact. In reality, child poverty is family poverty, and if the funds that are available to those who have been receiving them are to be reduced, it is bound to be unhelpful statistically, quite apart from the unhelpful nature of those reductions to the families concerned.

Mr Elliott: A number of areas of Northern Ireland were brought together in the social investment fund. What criteria were used by the Department to bring those areas together? Why, in particular, were the north-west and the border areas put into one area?

Mr P Robinson: There is no simple answer to the question. There could have been more areas and they could have been composed in different ways. What we put into the consultation document made sense as an attempt to group areas that have roughly equal levels of deprivation, perhaps even increasing the area covered to ensure that that was the case. However, it is a consultation document, and if the Member has a better idea of a means of division, we are happy to look at it. I hope that the community sector and the third sector will look at the document to see whether there are better ways in which we can do things, not only by looking at the zones identified in the document but at the general proposals.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

2. **Mr Givan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the process to appoint the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation. (AQO 722/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: A public appointment process to select a chairperson and up to six members for the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation is under way. I cannot comment in detail about the process, as it is ongoing, and although I have not yet had sight of the report, I expect to be given it in the next 24 hours. However, in a verbal report, we have been informed that the panel is concerned that, overall, the pool of appointable candidates does not have a sufficient breadth of relevant experience to cover fully all the responsibilities of the corporation. We will announce the outcome of the competition in due course.

The regeneration of the site has the potential to act as a social and economic generator, in line with our commitment to maximise the economic, historical and reconciliation potential of the Maze/Long Kesh site. Initial development of the two anchor projects will provide a catalyst to attract further investment and, we hope, thousands of jobs.

Mr Givan: I know that the First Minister will agree with me that the site represents one of the best investment opportunities for Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is critical that we get the membership of the board right.

I am interested to know in what ways those who have applied, or the pool of candidates, have been deemed to be deficient. Furthermore, does the First Minister agree that Lisburn City Council has always been committed to the project and has always shown energy in working towards this development opportunity? Does he agree that it is very important that the board, as it is developed, harnesses that support and commitment from the council?

Mr P Robinson: Any application process will bring forward those whom it is felt are

appointable and will leave behind those whom it is felt are not. The difference in this case, and what has been indicated to us, is that although there are a number of people who are appointable, there is a requirement to have certain skills and competencies represented on the overall board. It is felt that the applicants are somewhat light on private sector, business and financial experience, and that is an area that we will need to look at.

We have some room to manoeuvre if we choose to do so, because although we originally sought a board of six members, we can increase the corporation beyond that. Therefore, we could advertise for further potential members. The deputy First Minister and I are strongly of the view that there should be council support and representation on that corporation, and I hope that we will look at that matter when we receive the report.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, deputy first principal Speaker. May I ask — *[Laughter.]* You will forgive me for a bit of job misallocation this afternoon. However, I thank the First Minister for his responses so far. Is he in a position to give us any further information on what the development corporation's priorities may be?

Mr P Robinson: There are clearly two significant projects, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I hope that you are enjoying your new title.

The project that we are certain that we want to move forward with is the proposition that there should be a peace and reconciliation centre — call it what you may. We have applied for European Community funding from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). We should know the outcome of that, I hope, before the end of this month.

We are also very keen for the Balmoral agricultural show to move from Belfast to the more agricultural setting of Lagan Valley. That would be a strong anchor to the site, should the show choose to move and should we be able to negotiate an agreement. Again, we hope that those would form two key components to the site, around which it would be possible to build very significant business and commercial units and to generate literally thousands of jobs in and around that general area.

Mr Copeland: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I, too, thank the First Minister for his answer. I want to draw his attention to a recent debate during which it was stated that the funding application to the SEUPB could be shared. Although he touched on that, will he give further information as to the mechanisms and the way in which that application may be brought forward?

Mr P Robinson: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, suffice it to say that we have submitted an application for the project as we envisaged it. We have not released that application publicly, because SEUPB is of the general view that such matters are confidential until the body takes a funding decision, at which stage we will, obviously, release details of the application. We have not sought to share it with anyone. Of course, the final decision will come later in the process. However, I hope that by the next time that I am due to take questions for oral answer, we will know where we stand with this issue.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

3. **Mr Dallat** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the consultation responses to the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy which purported that the 2005 'A Shared Future' document was more cohesive in its vision for a shared society. (AQO 723/11-15)

5. **Mr McCallister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the responses that have been received to the consultation on the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. (AQO 725/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

The consultation on the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) attracted 288 written responses and included a wealth of views and material gathered from 11 public meetings and 15 targeted sectoral meetings. Those were in addition to the information that was collected through the omnibus survey. Our priority now is to achieve political consensus on the range of issues that will enable a final document and an associated high-level action plan to be published. To that

end, all parties represented on the Executive have nominated members to the cross-party working group. That group has been meeting almost weekly since Tuesday 27 September, with, I think, one exception, and it will meet more regularly if necessary.

The public consultation's purpose was to garner wider opinion on the draft proposals, to enable all points of view to be considered and to draft the final version of the policy. The individual responses and the consultation analysis will inform the group's work plan over the coming weeks as it seeks to agree on a strategic direction against each of the themes that have emerged.

I should, perhaps, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, have said that, with your permission, I intend to answer questions 3 and 5 together because they are on identical themes.

We recognise that the consultation process raised a number of important issues, which I can come back to. The good news is that we carried out a consultation, that we are listening to what was said in it, and that we are trying to tailor our document to provide something that will be really useful in taking forward good relations policy.

2.45 pm

Mr Dallat: I welcome the junior Minister's positive response. I certainly agree that the House needs good news about such issues. Is it not a sad irony, however, that the consultation found that the document drawn up by a direct rule Minister was more desirable than the one drawn up under the present Administration?

Mr Bell: I welcome and encourage your positive contribution. Junior Minister Anderson and I also welcome the very positive cross-party contributions that we have seen. This is not the time for point scoring. The Ulster Unionists and the SDLP had their chance to deliver a document but they significantly failed to do so. They could not even agree on a document that would go to the Executive. I appreciate that it is hard for them to see someone else come along and actually do the job, get universal agreement on that job — including agreement from the Ulster Unionist Party — and put it out for consultation.

It was important that we got to work on young people, for example. I worked as a social worker with young people for 21 years. The response from the youth sector was this: "You have, in parts, demonised young people. So what you need to do in your document is to reflect the positive contribution that they have made". Was that a criticism? Yes. Was that criticism right? In my opinion, it was. Will the final document reflect what was in the consultation? It will. Will we have a better document than the one that we had before? Yes, and it will be better because of that constructive criticism from the youth sector, which also gave us a lot of encouragement. It may not be perfect, but half a loaf is better than no bread.

Mr McCallister: It is probably good that the junior Minister left the Ulster Unionist Party on that principled stand over the CSI document. I congratulate him on continuing with his good work. Given Joanne Wallace's response to the group and to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which my colleague chairs, and her criticisms of the document, how committed is he to redrafting the entire document?

Mr Bell: I think that the paucity of the Member's question is reflected in the fact that he has to go back to a previous century, but then maybe that is where his party actually is.

The reality is that the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP had an opportunity. What they needed to do was to get a document agreed by the Executive and put it out for consultation. Did they fail? They clearly did. Now, I do not want to shine a light on the SDLP on this point, because I know how difficult it is for that party when a light is shone on it. [Interruption.] The Member for South Belfast is shouting from a sedentary position. The reality for him is that we got a document —

Mr McCallister: Nobody likes it.

Mr Bell: We got a document agreed by the Executive. Mr McCallister is shouting, "Nobody likes it". If that is the case, why did the Ulster Unionist Minister agree to it being put out to consultation? *[Interruption.]* So, the reality is that —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Bell: — we need to get agreement on a way forward. You may joke, point score and fail, but the reality is that we need to get a document that reflects the good work that is being done

on the ground. I see people in the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group coming together, which is in contrast to the immaturity that I see here. In my constituency, I see conflict murals coming down and images reflecting a positive heritage going up. I see children from my area meeting children from a different area, and the same thing is happening in Foyle. The community folks are well ahead of your simple point scoring.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his comments so far. Will he confirm that the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sector was also contacted during the CSI consultation and that its views will be taken on board by the five-party working group?

Mr Bell: I am happy to confirm that all groups have been involved in the programme, which reflects the needs of all groups in all sections of our society. The programme for cohesion, sharing and integration will benefit everybody in our community, but its core focus must be on tackling sectarianism and racism. We want to build a strong community in Northern Ireland in which all people, regardless of their race, colour, political opinion, age, gender, disability or sexual orientation, can live, work and socialise in a context of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect. The House and the watching public will look at the Members who are trying to shout me down when I speak about fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect. That is probably more worthy of Basil Brush than Basil McCrea.

The programme recognises the promotion of equality of opportunity as being an integral aspect of building a better future for everyone. That is what it is about and is what the community is interested in. Some communities are well ahead of us: progress is being made in Strangford, and I hear about what is happening in Foyle and in Belfast. We want not only to ensure that we have the programme but that we commit ourselves as a society to tackling hate crime and to developing a zero tolerance approach to all incidents that are motivated by hate and prejudice.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Minister confirm his and, indeed, this party's commitment to building the long-held commitment of a shared future? Does he agree that all parties in the House should work together to ensure a final strategy for the benefit of all people in Northern Ireland?

Mr Bell: I am more than happy to confirm not only the position of OFMDFM but the position of our party to a 100% commitment to a shared future agenda. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has put its money where its mouth is. We have not only talked about the programme but have issued the document and provided 30% additional funding despite cuts from the Ulster Unionists and Conservatives. We are interested in building a shared future and reaching agreement on shared housing. The First Minister has led from the front on sharing and integration. We also have a coherent consideration of the issue of shared space. As I said, I have just come from an event in the Bowtown community in my constituency. That community has removed symbols of conflict and is developing a positive youth agenda. Frankly, folks, in this House, we should get behind such communities rather than joke about them.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn, and question 5 has been grouped.

Child Poverty

6. **Mr A Maginness** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of whether the Institute for Fiscal Studies' declaration that it is 'inconceivable' that the Westminster Government will reach their child poverty targets applies equally in Northern Ireland. (AQO 726/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell: We recognise the links between achievement in life and issues of poverty. We are committed to the goal of eradicating child poverty by 2020. The Executive published their strategy in March 2011, and we are now finalising a child poverty action plan and outcomes model.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the junior Minister for his response. The deputy First Minister agrees with me about the scandal and serious nature of the problem of child poverty. Given the pressing and difficult circumstances in which we live, what extra work can the Executive do to help to eradicate child poverty in Northern Ireland?

Mr Bell: The Member raises serious points, and he raises them very well. I will not reiterate the work on the social investment fund and the social protection fund, nor will I run through each area of ministerial responsibility. However, I will give you the key area.

As the First Minister said earlier, child poverty cannot be considered outside of family poverty, and the way to lift people out of family poverty is with a reasonable wage. That will reduce child poverty. Critical to that will be proper employment and ensuring that young people are set up with the employability skills necessary to meet the market in the 21st century.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the junior Minister for his answers thus far. I am delighted that he mentioned the pilot scheme on reducing child poverty. Can he give us more details on that? What stage is the business case at?

Mr Bell: We are all fully committed to tackling child poverty, and the public service agreement targets were included in the objective of working towards the elimination of child poverty by 2020 and the elimination of severe child poverty by 2012. The honourable Member asks pertinent questions as to progress against those targets. We are looking at a monitoring framework for life opportunities that was published on 14 October 2010. It provided an assessment of progress against the Programme for Government commitment to reduce by half child relative income poverty by 2010-11. The assessment was that child relative income poverty rates had fallen in comparison to the 1998-99 baseline.

Mr Lyttle: Will up-to-date, Northern Ireland-specific child poverty targets be included in the upcoming Programme for Government?

Mr Bell: We are looking very seriously at how we can measure where our children are relative to other children in our United Kingdom. I am happy to write to provide the Member with specific details.

Ilex Regeneration Plan

7. **Mr Durkan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the regeneration plan, proposed by the Ilex company in Londonderry, is not mentioned in the draft Programme for Government. (AQO 727/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The draft Programme for Government has not been published. Perhaps the Member can explain on what basis he framed that question.

Mr Durkan: OK. As a supplementary, then, can I ask whether the 'One Plan' is included in the draft Programme for Government? If so, have any funds been ring-fenced for its implementation?

Mr P Robinson: We resent the fact that when we provide party leaders and Ministers with the officials' draft of the Programme for Government, we have it being waved from the SDLP Back Benches and leaked to the BBC. That does not help to build trust within the Executive. Indeed, it crushes the possibility of having further iterations of that document spread more widely among Executive colleagues. The last 10 iterations of the Programme for Government that I have seen do include the 'One Plan', but it will be for the Executive to approve the Programme for Government, and when it is published properly in the Assembly, the Member will be able to ask questions on it.

Mr Campbell: When are decisions likely to be made on issues that were among the commitments made in the original draft Programme for Government?

Mr P Robinson: The intention for the present draft that we have been working on is for it to go forward to the Executive during the course of Wednesday. With the permission of the Business Committee and the approval of the Executive, we want the Programme for Government — and, indeed, our investment strategy and economic strategy — to be published on Thursday. That is subject to the caveats that I have outlined.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I remind Members that they must continually stand in their places if they are looking to be called for a supplementary question. It is not enough to indicate once and then sit down.

3.00 pm

Regional Development

Altnagelvin Hospital: Transport from Fermanagh

1. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development what public transport services are

available for people from Fermanagh who have to travel to Altnagelvin Hospital.
(AQO 736/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Member raises an important issue. I am very sympathetic to the needs of people in Fermanagh and other rural areas in accessing health and other services. Translink has informed me that it provides seven daily services from Enniskillen to Altnagelvin Area Hospital via either Omagh or the Ballygawley park-and-ride car park that are routed through Foyle Street, Londonderry. There are also seven daily services for the return trip. The average journey time from Enniskillen bus station to Altnagelvin Area Hospital and the return trip is around three hours using the Translink service exclusively.

However, we need to recognise the constraints that are faced in providing public transport solutions in rural areas, especially over significant distances and where there is a dispersed population. Nevertheless, because of the length of the journey time in that case, I have asked my officials to work with Translink to look at the possibility of using funding available from the rural transport fund to help to deliver a more direct service. I want to point out that members of rural transport partnerships in Fermanagh can also make use of their local partnership services to take them from their homes to Enniskillen or Omagh bus station and back again.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his positive response, particularly the fact that he has asked officials to engage with the matter. I have raised the issue with Ulsterbus on a number of occasions, and its response has been that it is not viable for it to introduce such a route. Will the Minister go back to Ulsterbus and ask it to look at the number of people who would travel from Enniskillen to Altnagelvin Area Hospital if an adequate service were put on, particularly taking into consideration people who have to be in Derry for an early morning appointment?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I can say that that would be and is an operational decision for Translink. Obviously, it is obliged to operate as a commercial company, and, as such, it has to consider providing a service where there is clear demand for it unless that service is subsidised directly. With that in mind, I am prepared to have that conversation with Translink.

Flood Prevention

2. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any plans for better co-operation and co-ordination between the Roads Service, the Rivers Agency and Northern Ireland Water in relation to flood prevention and the response to emergencies. (AQO 737/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Through the Executive's flooding incident line, my Department's Roads Service, NI Water and Rivers Agency provide a co-ordinated response to calls for assistance from those who are affected during flooding events. The flood liaison group promotes co-operation and co-ordination between those organisations, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and the local government emergency management group before, during and after flooding events. That group maintains and reviews on an ongoing basis a schedule of combined multiagency flooding hotspots to manage the risks that are associated with surface water flooding. That may include developing preventative measures, such as the design, guidance and promotion of sustainable drainage systems in addition to facilitating co-ordinated responses to emergencies.

The flood liaison group has developed best practice guidelines that provide a framework for the agencies involved to co-ordinate their responses to flooding incidents. That document establishes lines of communication and reporting across agencies. In addition, Roads Service and NI Water have advised that they are involved in the implementation of the Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009, for which the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is the competent authority, with Rivers Agency in the lead.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his question. I really feel —

Mr Kennedy: It was your question. I answered it.

Dr McDonnell: Right, sorry. I thank the Minister for his answer and for putting me right there.

The Minister quoted a number of documents and all the rest to us. However, how long will it take to identify an effective and efficient strategy for co-operation across the agencies and to test it so that barriers that hinder flood

prevention and a rapid response are identified and acted on? It used to be Belfast that flooded, and we managed to fix that to some extent. However, I had a nightmare when I looked at villages such as Beragh in Tyrone, for example, where flooding continues to happen. Can we ensure that such flooding never happens again?

Mr Kennedy: Perhaps the lighting was bad for the Member, but the issue that he raises is important. A proper and co-ordinated response by all agencies is desirable, and I will play my part in that. It is important that we add to the list of agencies that I mentioned, because I believe that the Department of the Environment and even the Northern Ireland Environment Agency should have a role in all those issues.

As to the very regrettable and unfortunate recent flooding incident in Beragh and other places, Roads Service provided assistance at the time. It is evident that the flooding emanated from the river and that there were no issues associated with my Department's infrastructure. However, it will facilitate any works to be undertaken by the Rivers Agency.

Mr Beggs: The question rightly points out that co-operation between the statutory agencies is important, but does the Minister agree that one agency missing from the list is the Planning Service? There needs to be increased recognition from the Planning Service of how development upstream of a flooding area can have significant adverse effects on areas susceptible to flooding.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for that well-made point. I want the Planning Service and the Department of the Environment generally to be more involved in the co-ordinated work of all the agencies.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What responsibility do statutory agencies have for flooding in undesignated watercourses?

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will know, that creates a considerable problem because many areas that suffer from flooding, such as small rivers that burst their banks in excessive weather conditions, are undesignated courses. All agencies do their level best to improve the situation, and that working together seeks to improve the conditions. However, we will have to look to certain areas to provide a more comprehensive response to some of the localised flooding caused by such incidents.

Footpaths: Backaderry Road, Leitrim, County Down

3. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to provide footpaths at the Backaderry Road, Leitrim, County Down. (AQO 738/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: To make the most effective use of the limited funding available, Roads Service has an assessment procedure that compares and prioritises potential local transport and safety measures, such as the provision of footpaths at the Backaderry Road. That process takes into account a number of factors, including traffic volumes and collision history, and determines which are included in its works programme.

A recent reassessment of the Backaderry proposal indicated that it did not attract high priority in comparison with other potential schemes. On that basis, Roads Service advised that it currently has no plans to provide any new footpaths at Backaderry Road, Leitrim, County Down, but will continue to keep the situation under review. Although I fully appreciate the concerns of residents in asking for those measures, unfortunately, the number of requests for that type of work greatly exceeds the resources available to my Department.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Mind you, I do not agree with it. Hundreds of young people use the crossroads at that location to access GAA facilities and nursery provision, and there are businesses in the area. Therefore, I ask the Minister to look at the issue again and take into account the other criteria that I mentioned.

Mr Kennedy: I understand the disappointment expressed by the Member. My officials and I are aware of the close proximity of sporting facilities and, indeed, the playgroup centre. However, surveys have been carried out over the summer and early autumn, and they indicated that the route was generally little-used by pedestrians on a day-to-day basis. A vehicle and pedestrian count carried out on a school day in September 2011 recorded only four pedestrians in the peak morning hour. With that type of background and those figures, it will be difficult for it to

be carried forward at an early stage, which, of course, the Member would undoubtedly like.

Mrs McKevitt: What priority has the Minister given to the provision of footpaths and street lighting in rural areas in South Down? Will he have early discussions with Roads Service to ensure that the unique topography of that constituency is given proper consideration in the provision of infrastructure?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. I can confirm that Roads Service uses an objective assessment procedure to determine inclusion in programmed improvement works. That helps to ensure that all requests are considered on a fair and equitable basis across Northern Ireland and that resources are targeted on schemes and at locations that are in the greatest need of improvement. However, I will write to the Member about recent provision in her constituency of South Down.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that, despite pleas by local residents using footpaths or roads, it is quite often the case that it is only after a serious accident or perhaps a fatality occurs on a busy road that Roads Service provides what the residents asked for in the first place?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question; however, I am slightly concerned at the message that it conveys. My Department looks at all applications objectively and in a fair and comprehensive manner, in an attempt to be as much help as possible in all cases. It is simply not always possible, because of the conditions or because of the available finance, for every scheme to be included. The Member should at least recognise that Roads Service officials all over Northern Ireland are seeking to improve their areas as quickly, effectively and efficiently as possible. I know that he would not want to imply any criticism of their important work.

Exercise Watermill

4. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the findings of Exercise Watermill. (AQO 739/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Water mock incident known as Exercise Watermill is one part of the overall process of implementing and validating improvements made since the events of last winter. The exercise was carried out on Wednesday 26 October 2011 and provided the company with the opportunity to test its procedures for dealing with an emergency. An external third party was contracted to monitor and evaluate Northern Ireland Water's performance and is compiling a report on the outcome of the exercise. Northern Ireland Water has already provided initial feedback, purely from the company's perspective, to the Regional Development Committee and, informally, to the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the CCNI.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his reply thus far. Exercise Watermill appears to have been useful in dealing with water shortage, but will the Minister advise what action he has taken to reduce the 80% loss of water that escaped from private property and caused the shortage in the first place?

3.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will know, as do others, about the considerable promotional and advertising campaign that NI Water has embarked on this winter under the banner "Don't wait. Insulate". I commend that campaign to Members. It is geared not only at householders but at those in business and those with development sites, at which there were significant leakages and losses of water from the system last year, which affected the overall situation. We want to encourage everyone to play their part.

NI Water, having carried out the major incident preparation, awaits the draft consultant's report, but, from its own evaluation, it has identified that the mobilisation of all teams worked well; that new information flow processes and the intelligent voice recognition (IVR) system were tested; that stakeholder communications and media handling capabilities were improved; and that the major emergency group headed by the CEO was highly effective in providing a strategic overview. I very much hope that, in conjunction with that and the winter awareness campaign, we can all play our part in limiting the potential for frozen and burst pipes.

Mr Spratt: The Minister mentioned that the Committee for Regional Development had been briefed by Northern Ireland Water. We have not yet received a full briefing on Exercise Watermill. Will he confirm whether the Department is

getting any further briefings from Northern Ireland Water? Furthermore, will he confirm that the Department will keep the Committee fully informed of its views on exactly what happened during Exercise Watermill?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Committee Chairperson for all the assistance that he and the Committee members have offered throughout the entire process. I want to continue to involve him and the Committee members as we enter the winter period. Northern Ireland Water has been implementing the recommendations of the Utility Regulator's report and the lessons learned in the company. It has improved its website, and there is increased capacity from 20,000 hits a day to 200,000 hits an hour. It has increased the number of telephone lines at the call centre, and there are more dedicated lines for elected representatives.

Northern Ireland Water also has arrangements in place to quickly increase the number of call handlers in an emergency, including a spillover contract with a third-party call centre. A revised major incident plan has been drawn up. The company has doubled the amount of bottled water, making available a quarter of a million litres of water, and has increased the number of customers on the critical care register from 600 to nearly 2,000. There has been progress, which has been helpfully assisted and monitored by the Committee for Regional Development. We look forward to continuing that work.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-Leas Cheann Comhairle. For comparative reasons and to address any mistakes that may have been made, are there any plans to repeat Exercise Watermill?

Mr Kennedy: The key will be the report from the independent consultants. We will avail ourselves of that and examine it in detail. We are now in the middle of November, and it could well be, although I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, that, because of real weather conditions, we could enter any type of emergency at any stage. It will be important to evaluate the results of the exercise that has recently been carried out and apply any lessons from that and any further improvements.

Drinking Water

5. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the main changes in drinking water quality as outlined in the latest report published by Northern Ireland Water. (AQO 740/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In the latest report on water quality, for 2010, the drinking water inspectorate assesses that the overall quality of water provided by NI Water continued to improve from 99·79% to 99·86% compliance with regulatory requirements. That figure is based on more than 100,000 tests carried out across the water network. Considering only the tests at consumers' taps, compliance increased from 99·74% to 99·81%. The level of microbiological compliance, which the Member will be particularly interested in, increased from 99·87% to 99·95%. The total number of reported events that may cause concern about water quality reduced from 55 to 36. Those improvements in overall water quality are the result of the investment in water treatment in recent years. However, we must continue to invest to maintain quality and address the condition of older water mains.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his very informative answer. Does he accept that the report shows continuing general improvement in the quality of water and indicates that we are meeting or are at least close to meeting the quality requirements that have been set? Will he give us some indication of how we perform against the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his encouragement. The standards are important because they are European requirements. They are also important to ensure the quality of the water for our population. As the Member knows, water quality across the United Kingdom is compared using the measure known as mean zonal compliance (MZC), which is a comparator index that is calculated to best reflect the average quality of water at consumers' taps across a geographical area. It was introduced in 2004. In 2010, mean zonal compliance in Northern Ireland was 99·81%. It was 99·77% in Scotland, so we are better. It was 99·96% in England and Wales, so we need to make some improvements to catch up with our counterparts there.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his comments about the quality of water. However, they will not sit well with my constituents in

Ballymoney, given the fact that some 3,000 households have been without water for almost a week. Although I appreciate that there has been an improvement in communication between Northern Ireland Water and public representatives, which has been helpful, it is a serious problem for the households that have been affected. Will the Minister inform the House when normal supply will resume? It is a very important issue. Can he confirm or deny that another contamination of the water supply took place at the weekend that could prolong the reintroduction of normal supply to the very needy households in the Ballymoney area?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I genuinely sympathise with those who are affected at this time. A notice was issued to residents in the Ballymoney area on 9 November, advising them to boil water before drinking or cooking with it. I assure the House that Northern Ireland Water is taking all steps necessary to resolve the incident and return services to normal as quickly as possible. We hope that early progress can be made.

The Member will of course accept that public health has to be our paramount concern. Northern Ireland Water continues to work with the health authorities and the drinking water inspectorate to resolve the water quality issues. The advice to boil water will remain in place until Northern Ireland Water and the Public Health Agency are content that any risk has passed and that water quality meets the normal high standard. The Member is right, and I thank him for his acknowledgement that Northern Ireland Water has provided regular information updates, not only to customers through the media but to elected representatives. Alternative water supplies have been provided to vulnerable customers, including schools and those on the critical care register. The drinking water inspectorate will carry out an investigation into the causes in response to the incident, as is normal practice.

Mr Dallat: I declare immediately that I am not from Ballymoney. Many other areas are now concerned that a similar incident may happen there. Has the Minister got a timetable for ensuring that compliance will be stepped up further to avoid the type of inconvenience that was thrust upon those 3,000 people in the Ballymoney area?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. NI Water, in conjunction with the Public Health Agency, will take all necessary action and seek to resolve all issues. Safety of public health must be and is the priority, and that is taken seriously not only by NI Water and the Public Health Agency but by me as Minister.

Mr Allister: Staying with the Ballymoney issue, surely it beggars belief that, in 2011, residents are still having to boil their water almost a week on from the problem having been discovered. The Minister referred to Exercise Watermill, but, in Ballymoney, it is "Exercise Water Boil". Why has it taken the Department so long to get its act together, and has there or has there not been another incident of contamination?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member, and I understand the anxiety and frustration that he reflects on behalf of the people in Ballymoney. The current advice to boil water will remain in place until Northern Ireland Water and the Public Health Agency are content that any risk has passed and that water quality meets the normal high standard. Northern Ireland Water hopes to be able to make a further announcement later today on the improving situation.

Northern Ireland Water: Advice Leaflet

6. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of whether the production of an advice leaflet by Northern Ireland Water on dealing with frozen pipes this winter is an adequate response to this matter. (AQO 741/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The production of an advice leaflet to inform customers of how to prepare for winter is only one element of Northern Ireland Water's overall programme of work, which has included improvements to Northern Ireland Water's communications, emergency planning and increased alternative supplies, among other measures. A public awareness campaign has been initiated, involving TV, radio, newspapers, information leaflets and NI Water's website, as well as other online outlets.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that answer. I have seen the public awareness campaign, and it is quite good. So, Minister, that is one feather in your cap. We are aware of last year's difficulties, so are you doing any proactive work in targeting

the constituencies, businesses and homes that suffered most during that frozen spell?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for her comprehensive vote of confidence in what has been achieved so far. It is important that, on a Northern Ireland level, we continue to get the message out. That important message is that we can encourage people to look out for themselves by insulating pipes, identifying where the stopcocks are and, perhaps, having emergency contact numbers available, not only for NI Water but for a local plumber.

I am pleased that elected Members have been part of that campaign. Recently, the Chair of the Regional Development Committee circulated to Members the hotline number so that they could report any leaks or problems. It is by working together in a collective and cohesive manner that we can best serve the entire community and deal with any issues that emerge.

3.30 pm

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Regional Development

A5 Road Scheme

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the contacts he has had with his counterpart, the Minister for Transport in Dublin, in relation to the recent announcement concerning the A5 road scheme.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Minister of Finance and Personnel and I met my counterpart, Leo Varadkar TD, and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin TD, in Dublin on 2 November 2011. The purpose of the meeting was to emphasise the importance of the Irish Government's investment in the A5 and A8 schemes being maintained.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will call Mr Pat Doherty to ask a supplementary question. After that, I will call each of the parties to ask a question.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his brief answer. Given the amount of work, public consultation and money spent so far on the A5, all of which led to a public inquiry, will the Minister assure the House that he is looking at a reprofiling schedule and not thinking of reallocating the moneys pledged by our Executive to it? When will the Minister next meet his counterpart Minister in the South, Leo Varadkar, given that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have already met Taoiseach Enda Kenny?

Mr Kennedy: I gently remind the Member and the House that I am the roads Minister. Obviously, I will look at the options available for utilising funding within the tight time frames of the current budgetary period. It is also important to state that, as well as the A5 scheme, there is the position of the A8 scheme. That is a Trans-European Network route, and any delay to that would give rise to significant concern. I am aware that the First Minister and

deputy First Minister met Enda Kenny in the margins of the inauguration of the president on Friday. The Member may also know that a full plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council is scheduled for next Friday in Armagh. I do not wish to be a prophet or the son of a prophet, but I envisage some discussion on the issue not only in the run-up to that meeting, perhaps through officials, but at that plenary meeting.

Mr Spratt: Will the Minister advise the House what contingent priorities he has in place for the redistribution of any surplus finances that could come from the Executive as a result of the withdrawal of match funding from the Republic of Ireland Government? Has he any projects that may be given priority in the redistribution of such finances?

Mr Kennedy: A number of schemes in the roads programme are sufficiently advanced to enable construction to proceed within the current Budget period, subject, of course, to successful procurement and the availability of finance. It is, perhaps, not that helpful to speculate about where those are. However, I can advise the Member that any number of Members, when they meet me in the corridor or ring me, give me advice about where and on what project it would be good to spend money. Of course, those projects include ones from all over Northern Ireland. As roads Minister, my commitment to the people of Northern Ireland is to enhance the road network all over Northern Ireland in a way that uses the resources made available to me effectively.

Mr Beggs: I have never quite understood why the A8 was linked to the A5, but will the Minister confirm that the A8 between Larne and Bruslee is the only section of single carriageway between the busy rural port of Larne and Cork?

Mr Kennedy: Yes; the Member's geography is spot on, there is no doubt about that. The A8 is a significant scheme, and its completion would be part of the completion of the Trans-European Network that has been long promised. So, I understand perfectly the Member for East Antrim raising the issue of the port of Larne, which is in his constituency, and the importance of the A8 to the area.

In the wider context, as roads Minister, I am concerned that we maintain the confidence of the construction industry and the road construction industry, in particular, because there is and will be widespread concern. Therefore, it is incumbent on me to identify potential schemes and projects that can be carried forward to enable contracts to be let and to help ease the very significant pressure that a great many companies and firms are feeling at this time. I am in the business of assisting those companies and want to see improvements to the overall road network throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement thus far in linking the A8 and the A5, given that they were part of a joint project. Does he accept that the funding from the Executive is earmarked funding and that it would therefore be very difficult to change it given the circumstances? Does he further agree that the Roads Service project team has advanced the planning and development stage to the extent that all it is waiting for is the green light?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question, and he is factually correct. Given that the A5/A8 scheme was an Executive priority, the moneys allocated against it, if they are to be reprofiled, will go back to the centre for reallocation. As roads Minister, I am indicating clearly that I will have projects that will be ready to have money spent on them.

It is important that we move quickly to reassure local companies and road builders generally and that we are not helping to put further pressure on companies that face great uncertainty and are seriously worried about the high number of people that they continue to employ and want to employ. So, I will indicate to the House and have no shame in so doing that I am in the business of bidding for money, should it become available, so that we can spend money on roads all over Northern Ireland.

Mr Dickson: In respect of the situation in which we find ourselves, may I ask that you and your Executive colleagues work to ensure that none of the money that may have to be reprofiled as a result of the decision of the Irish Government ends up back in the hands of Treasury? I am sure you will agree with me and my colleague Mr Beggs that the A2 is also a priority.

Mr Kennedy: I would have been shocked, if not offended, if the Member had not raised the A2. I understand the importance that he attaches to that project, as do other Members for the East Antrim constituency, including my colleague Mr Beggs.

There is a danger that some, perhaps including some political parties, may not realise the importance of being able to spend money in time and being able to spend money, particularly next year, effectively on the ground. The significant danger is that the money will be lost and will go back to the Treasury. I do not think that anyone in Northern Ireland, least of all those in the road construction industry, would thank any political party, the Assembly or the Executive if that occurs. I am mindful of that, which is why I am actively looking at bringing forward projects that will spend the money, create jobs and give some comfort to that industry.

Mr Allister: I suggest to the Minister that now is the moment to face facts and cut adrift the sentiment and the politics that have hitherto driven the A5 project, which has now crashed so spectacularly. Does the Minister agree that the resulting mess has arisen in part from placing reliance on what turned out to be a broken promise of £400 million from the Dublin Government, with Northern Ireland having spent £30-plus million on the back of that, leaving it substantially the loser? Will he assure us that, in light of the renewed promise of £40 million, which could equally be broken, we will not continue to build our road structure on what could turn out to be broken promises and will instead do what should be done? The Minister would be shocked if I did not suggest that that would be upgrading the A26.

Mr Kennedy: I wondered, as the Member approached the end of his question, when the A26 would feature. He did not disappoint. I agree with him to the extent that I think we all have to realise that there is a significant difference between a contribution of £400 million and one of £40 million. That fact must be faced. We have to come to terms with that, no matter how any contribution is profiled and at what point it is profiled.

One concern that I have is that the mandate of this Assembly is due to expire in 2015, and we do not know whether the reduced Irish contribution will have begun even at that stage and will carry forward into further years. I have to be careful, as I cannot mandate or commit a future Assembly or Executive to spending money on that basis. We need to develop the conversation with the Irish Government to see what, if anything, is really possible. I expect that we will do that in the coming days, probably at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting on Friday.

Mr Agnew: Unfortunately, I have not had the opportunity to nab the Minister in the corridor, so I will take the opportunity now to remind him of the debate we had during election time on the 'Politics Show'. At that time, the Road Haulage Association said that it wanted not necessarily new roads but more efficient roads. Will the Minister prioritise any excess that he has in his budget towards maintaining our existing road infrastructure and making sure it is of a good standard and our roads are safe, and promoting and improving public transport services, on which there has been a history of underspend?

Mr Kennedy: The Member raises a reasonable point. Many people are concerned that, at the moment, we are not as able to maintain some of the roads in our authority as we might be, yet we are seeking to build new roads. That is an important point. Nevertheless, as I said, we also need to give comfort to the construction industry, including the road-building industry, which is facing concerns and worry at this time. It is my job to bring forward projects, both to facilitate new road building across Northern Ireland and to maintain the network we have in a proper and fit condition.

3.45 pm

Private Members' Business

Smoking in Cars Carrying Children

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly recognises the damaging effects of passive smoking; notes that children are particularly exposed to second-hand smoke; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work closely with the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation, in association with a public awareness campaign, to ban smoking in cars carrying passengers under the age of 16. — [Mr McCallister.]*

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I listened carefully to what Members have said already. It is clear that passive smoking has a very detrimental impact on health, particularly children's health, given their high ventilation rates and the fact that their lungs are still growing. I welcome the comments today, although I am not so sure about Mr Wells's quite disparaging comment about bars and pubs in County Mayo. I am sure that he meant no disrespect to Mayo's tourism industry.

On a more serious note, many of us have young children and recognise the dangers that second-hand smoke can pose to them. We do our best to protect them from whatever dangers lie ahead. We insist on them wearing seat belts in the car and bicycle helmets when they play on bikes or go-karts outside. However, there is not such a high level of public awareness of the issue of second-hand smoke. I noticed with interest that there has not really been a public campaign on passive smoking since about 2003. We are talking eight years since there was a targeted campaign on the dangers of passive smoking, which is probably too long. The Minister should look at ensuring that we have an awareness campaign.

Children are very savvy nowadays. They will tell you what it is good to do from an environmental point of view and what you need to know. They are all very opinionated and punch well above their weight when it comes to making decisions in the home. I do not smoke, so it is not necessarily an issue for my own ones; however, if I were a smoker and I smoked around them, they are of an age now where they would tell me that that is not acceptable. I would listen to them, but, unfortunately, that is not the case for everyone.

The mother of a very good friend of mine died when my friend was a teenager. Her mother was in her early 40s and died of emphysema. My friend, who is now around the same age as her mother was when she died, suffers from a very weak chest and has a high incidence of chest infections. Her GP told her that passive smoking before her mother died was a major contributor to her many chest problems. My friend does not smoke and never has done, yet passive smoking decades ago has had a detrimental impact on her health.

There is much that is positive in today's motion, and we should raise awareness now. On the negative side, I am not sure how well we could enforce a ban. If we were to take the time to legislate on the issue, I am not sure how well that legislation could be enforced.

I agree that the introduction of the smoking ban in pubs, clubs and public places had the impact of reducing the amount that people smoked. When some people who smoked 20 a day found that they had to go outside to smoke, they cut back to maybe 15 a day. That is to be welcomed, and it is the kind of change that legislation can make. Legislation can cut back on the amount that you indulge, so it could have benefits.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Member for giving way, bearing in mind that we will scrutinise any such legislation that comes through at the Health Committee. Does she think that it would be any more difficult to enforce than the laws regarding mobile phone use, seat belt wearing in the rear of a car or children being in a proper child seat? I feel that it would not, and I wonder what her views are on that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Gildernew: It would be as difficult to enforce. There are probably still an awful lot more people using a mobile in their car than have ever been caught. I think that we have all chanced the odd wee telephone call when we should not have; a whole lot of us have done it and not been caught. The point is that that is hard to enforce as well.

I believe that there would be difficulty in enforcing the legislation and, as the Member pointed out, we would scrutinise the legislation,

should it come to the Health Committee. However, there are other pieces of legislation that are more of a priority: for example, the adoption Bill and the mental capacity Bill. I am anxious that we scrutinise legislation from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety as quickly as possible and that it is legislation that will make a difference. That is my key point. A ban would probably make some difference to people's smoking habits, but a public awareness campaign could also do that. On the back of this debate, it is incumbent on the Minister to bring forward a public awareness campaign and to ensure that the message goes out. We cannot ignore the fact that more than six people a day in the North of Ireland die through smoking-related illnesses; 2,300 people every year —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms Gildernew: The pressure that that puts on health resources is hugely wasteful, apart from the fact that a lot of people have their life curtailed as a result of smoking.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and congratulate those who tabled it. I stress that the motion is not about attacking smokers' rights; it is about protecting children's rights. We have already had an angry reaction in the media today from smokers who see this as yet another attack on their civil liberties. However, it is our job to educate them on the reasons and the need for legislation to increase the protection of our and their children from the dangers of passive smoking.

Members outlined the grave consequences of smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke, and Mr Wells gave a lot of statistical evidence on the dangers of passive smoking. Generally, I am reluctant to bandy statistics about, even more so in this case as a smoker friend of mine reminded me over the weekend that 100% of non-smokers die. Joking aside, research clearly indicates that children exposed to second-hand smoke are much more likely to suffer from conditions such as asthma, bronchitis, glue ear and other respiratory diseases. There are also links to sudden infant death syndrome.

Children are much more susceptible to damage from passive smoking because they breathe faster than adults and their respiratory systems are not fully developed. If the smoking takes place in a confined space such as a car, the damage caused is even greater. It is vital for us to raise awareness of those issues for the well-being of our children. Not only will it protect their precious health, but considerable savings will be made by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. It is estimated that second-hand smoke is responsible for 300,000 GP consultations and almost 10,000 hospital admissions each year. That is a huge cost to the Assembly and to the taxpayer.

As Mr McCrea identified in his intervention about seat belt legislation, there is evidence that legislation can have a positive outcome. However, we can influence genuine behavioural change much more by education and public awareness than by enforcement. The awareness caused by pushing forward the legislation will influence people and change how they act.

Mr McCarthy: Maith thú, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I, too, support the motion, and I congratulate Mr McCallister on proposing it. We support all measures that can be introduced and, most importantly, sustained to improve the health of our young people. However, like others, I am concerned about how such a proposal will be policed. Nevertheless, every effort should be made.

Northern Ireland has come a long, long way in a reasonably short time in tackling the scourge of tobacco smoking. Certainly, we must all continue to look at ways of furthering the decrease of smoking and all other risks to our health. I put on record my gratitude and that of the Alliance Party to all the local organisations involved and the Health Promotion Agency for the work that they have done so far. I remember them coming to the Building on a number of occasions and getting the support of all the MLAs on preventing smoking in various areas. We have, therefore, come a long way.

Once again, I thank our research and library service for its excellent comprehensive information pack. All the facts relating to the discussion that we are having today are in that pack.

The vast majority of organisations and people want to see something done to protect our children and, indeed, everyone else from unnecessary illness by keeping them away from tobacco. I pay tribute to our Department of Health for its 10-year control of tobacco strategy. That is leadership. We fully support its efforts to bring the strategy's contents to fruition, and we

give it every encouragement to do just that. The same can be said for the authorities across the water and the 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People' document and, in particular, its six recognised strands, which are stopping the promotion of tobacco, which is important; making tobacco less affordable; the effective regulation of tobacco products; helping tobacco smokers to quit the habit; reducing exposure to second-hand smoke, which is exactly what we are debating today; and effective communications, warnings etc for tobacco control. It also mentions public awareness, as has been said. That is very important.

I pay tribute to John McCallister and the BBC. I woke up this morning to John's voice coming over the airwaves; in fact, I think that we have heard it every hour of the day since. That is what we need to hear most about. People will get the message and, hopefully—

Mr B McCrea: I wonder if I misheard you. Did you say that you heard John McCallister and that we needed to hear more from him?

Mr McCarthy: Maybe not at such an early hour as this morning, but that is what we call public awareness, and we certainly support it.

It is most interesting to note that, at Westminster, under the 10-minute rule, the Smoking in Private Vehicles Bill received its First Reading on 22 June of this year. Despite some MPs' disagreement, it passed that stage and will have its Second Reading on 25 November. Members may have noticed that the Tory MP who is the Prime Minister has expressed his disagreement with the proposal. Perhaps the motion is yet another attempt by some Members of the Ulster Unionist Party to extricate themselves from the clutches of the Tories.

Mr McCallister: That is a bit of a far stretch.

Mr McCarthy: It is worth noting anyway. It is also interesting to note what public opinion has to say about a policy on a smoke-free environment. The majority of our population prohibits smoking in their homes and vehicles. That is to be welcomed very much. The majority of people agree that legislation on smoke-free environments should also include vehicles in which children are travelling. Over 80% of children are aware that passive smoking is harmful. A large majority of the population agree that passive smoking is harmful and that a smoking ban in public places has been a good thing. We are, therefore, making progress, and let us hope that we can continue to do so.

The message that smoking can and does kill is getting through. Legislators, such as we in the Assembly, have a duty to move to overcome that self-inflicted health hazard. As it seems that little or no legislation is emanating from the Assembly, perhaps this motion, if passed today, might trigger someone in the Department to get cracking and bring something forward. I see that the Minister is in the Chamber this afternoon. I notice that the Health Minister in the South of Ireland is to legislate next year to protect children in cars from passive smoking. That will happen next year. Can we not do something similar or get moving first? As far as I know, our Health Minister is supportive of the action: Mr Poots, now is your chance.

I welcome the submissions on the subject that our local cancer groups made. Action Cancer tells us that as many as 13,500 youngsters in Northern Ireland are at risk from somebody else's smoke.

That is surely appalling in anyone's language.

4.00 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McCarthy: Approximately 20% of drivers allow smoking in cars. Surely car owners must consider the health of the youngsters.

There is much more to say. I fully support the motion.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCarthy: I hope that the measure gets through, either through John or through the Minister.

Ms Lewis: I support the motion. As we have heard, smoking is the single greatest cause of preventable illness and premature death in Northern Ireland. It kills around 2,300 people each year and places a heavy burden on our health service. Of those 2,300 deaths, around 800 are the result of lung cancer, which is the most common form of cancer for men and women. Smoking also causes coronary heart disease, strokes and other diseases of the circulatory system.

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

In economic terms, the cost of treating smoking-related illness in Northern Ireland is in the region of £119 million a year. However, it is much harder to quantify the human costs for those who die as the result of smoking or for those who suffer from a debilitating illness that is directly caused by smoking.

Smoking not only causes harm to the person who is a smoker, it is harmful to non-smokers through their exposure to second-hand smoke, and children and unborn babies are particularly vulnerable. Second-hand smoke is defined as:

> *"a mixture of sidestream smoke from the burning tip of the cigarette and mainstream smoke exhaled by the smoker."*

Scientific evidence suggests that there is no safe level of exposure to it.

It is the policy of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to create a tobacco-free society. The objectives of 'A Five Year Tobacco Action Plan 2003-2008' were to ensure that fewer people started smoking, smokers quit, and greater protection was given against tobacco-related harm. It is shocking to note that in 2007, almost 9% of children aged between 11 and 16 in Northern Ireland were smokers. That is a very worrying figure as smokers usually start in their teens.

For some years, smoking has been banned in all public buildings, including places of employment, shops, clubs, pubs and restaurants. The Royal College of Physicians has noted that that legislation is supported by smokers and non-smokers. I believe that the ban has had a positive effect on society, not just on our health but on our economy. This is with particular reference to the food and restaurant industry in Northern Ireland.

In most European countries and in large parts of the United States of America, smoking in public places is outlawed. I, therefore, believe that banning smoking in cars in the presence of minors is a worthy policy. In fact, I know that there are moves under way to ban it in England through a private Member's Bill, which is due to have its Second Reading on 25 November. However, government policy in England states that the Government do not want to include cars under laws on smoke-free environments. Instead, they want to discourage smoking in cars through public awareness campaigns.

I, in no way, want to take away from the benefits of such a policy, but I am concerned about policing such a measure. As mentioned, the use of mobile phones while driving was banned years ago, yet many people still use their mobile phones while driving despite the consequences of that having been dramatically highlighted in TV advertisements.

Mr McCallister: The Member's colleague Mr Wells used the example of a pub in Mayo, although I am sure that Mr Wells has not been in many pubs in Mayo. The point that people made when arguing against the banning of smoking in pubs and clubs was that it was over-enforcement. However, that proved to be a complete non-argument, as it was complied with by virtually 100% of the people.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Lewis: I agree with those sentiments; you are absolutely right. I feel that whatever can be done by the House to make smoking in cars, specifically cars carrying children, even more socially unacceptable than it already is for the majority of responsible adults, is a good thing. I reiterate my support for the motion.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the proposer of the motion, and I welcome the opportunity to speak to it. It costs the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety over £119 million each year to treat patients with smoke-related illnesses. Children and toddlers are at a much greater risk of the adverse effects of passive smoking due to the fact that their bodies are still growing and developing. They also breathe faster than adults and inhale smoke at a much quicker rate.

More recent studies have shown that exposure to second-hand smoke affects children's behaviour and learning ability, as well as there being the obvious health implications. That cannot be ignored. Children brought up in homes in which there is a smoker have scored lower in maths, in reading and in logic and reasoning tests. They are also more likely to be absent from school than children raised in a smoke-free home.

Studies have also shown that children exposed to passive smoking are more likely to have behavioural problems and may not develop mentally as quickly as other children. It should also be noted that being exposed to passive

smoking can lead to children and young people developing asthma, even though they were not born with it. Breathing in tiny amounts of smoke can bring on asthma attacks in children. Therefore, a child living or being in a home that is a smoking environment will have more frequent asthma attacks. That, again, has been proven by studies.

Society's views on the acceptability of smoking are changing, with fewer and fewer people willing to tolerate it. Therefore, we need to ensure that there is better education, a behavioural change and more campaigning to introduce further legislation. In April 2007, legislation imposing a total ban on smoking in workplaces came into effect. That ban has helped to protect people at work from the harmful chemicals that tobacco smoke produces. No doubt we all agree that that was a positive step, not only for people's lives but for the health service, because the cost of treating people for the effects of smoking runs into tens of millions of pounds a year.

The motion asks us to recognise the effects of passive smoking, of which I think we have no doubt. However, to introduce further legislation on top of existing legislation may not be the most productive way of protecting our children. Of course, we all want to ensure our children's health and well-being, but more laws can sometimes add to confusion. Perhaps we just need to use our available tools more wisely and smartly. Can that be achieved, and, if so, how? I believe that it can, by including private vehicles in the current legislation before any further legislation is introduced. We need more public awareness of the current regulations and further clarification and re-emphasising to the public of the law in that area.

Councils also need to address the lack of campaigning around the current smoke-free legislation. Employers and employees need to understand the law. In the present situation, it must be asked whether the public and working community take seriously the current ban on smoking in work vehicles. I do not believe that they do. Those caught smoking in a work vehicle normally respond to the penalty only when they are served with the threat of court action. Would it be the same if we were to ban smoking in cars carrying children under 16? Our councils' environmental health officers have great difficulty in enforcing the law as it stands. Do we need to add another layer to the process, and would doing so be an improvement?

Responsible parents and carers will do the responsible thing to ensure that their children are not exposed to the harmful effects of passive smoking.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Despite her argument, does she not accept what Mr McCarthy said, which was that an estimated 13,500 children in Northern Ireland are subjected to passive smoking? We need legislation to address that, because some parents or carers are not behaving responsibly. If the law as it stands were working, we would not have those numbers and the associated health problems.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Boyle: I agree. I am talking about the legislation as it stands, which, I know, environmental health officers in district councils find difficult to impose.

I believe that responsible parents and carers will do the responsible thing, namely ensure that their children are not exposed to the harmful effects of passive smoking.

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

Ms Boyle: It is my belief that parents will also make their children aware of the dangers. I agree, in principle, with the motion, which aims to protect the health and well-being of our children. I urge the Minister to listen to the motion and to bring forward legislation to deal with the issue.

Mr Dunne: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of the motion, as it centres on the need to protect children, with which I am sure everyone here will concur. In recent years, much progress has been made in protecting children from the health risks that smoking entails, with a reduction in the number of smokers, which has helped to lower the extent of second-hand smoke. Adults are now protected in public places, and yet we still expose our children to second-hand smoke in many places. We need to protect the four in 10 children in the UK who are growing up in homes where people smoke. Despite progress, we can do more to protect innocent children who are unfairly subjected to smoke inhalation, especially while travelling in a car.

More than 13,500 children in Northern Ireland are at risk. Smoking just one cigarette in a car immediately puts the air quality into the "unhealthy" category, with a single cigarette emitting 50 times more particles than a car's exhaust in the time that it takes to smoke it. Those figures are significant. I have seen the benefits of a smoke-free environment since the ban on smoking in public places was introduced in 2007; it has changed the environment in many places and made them much more welcoming. I am sure that many here today have shared that cleaner and healthier experience.

Having spoken to several charities, including the Ulster Cancer Foundation and Action Cancer, I fully share their desire to see full and real progress on the issue. I know that there is widespread support for such improvements. Indeed, they stress that although cancer is the main concern, smoking can also significantly increase the risk of asthma and chest issues, amongst other conditions. Children who live in homes where someone smokes most days are exposed to about seven times more smoke than those who live in smoke-free homes. There are real costs to our health service associated with second-hand smoke, with children's exposure to second-hand smoke estimated to generate over 300,000 UK GP consultations each year.

Although legislation that protects children should be the priority, awareness can often make a real difference. Highlighting the risks of smoking in an enclosed atmosphere such as a car, for example, would go some way towards bringing the risks to the attention of those who subject young innocent passengers to smoke inhalation. Enforcement would need to be closely looked at should any legislation ever be introduced. However, we need to ensure that the most effective measure is introduced, be it through legislation, education or another measure.

This is not a means of targeting smokers. We need to work with them, along with all other parties, in promoting the protection of children and young people from second-hand smoke. Public health is and must remain a key priority for all of us here, and I know that much work has already been done by our Health Minister. There is wide support in Northern Ireland for the promotion of healthier lifestyles, particularly for our young people, and this idea may be one that is worth supporting. I support the motion.

Mr Gardiner: I support the motion. Each year in the United Kingdom, over 300,000 children visit their GPs and 9,500 are admitted to hospital due to exposure to smoke in cars. That costs £23 million. Research by the British Lung Foundation found that 51% of eight- to 15-year-olds have been exposed to cigarette smoke in a car. Over one third of children with a parent who smokes state that the parent smokes while the child is a passenger.

4.15 pm

Legislation needs to reflect the prevailing public view. The whole point of having a legislative assembly is that it passes legislation that reflects what people want. I draw Members' attention to several important facts that indicate that we need to legislate on the matter to reflect the public mood properly.

First, smoke-free vehicles are already the norm. Seventy per cent of adults say that smoking is never allowed in their vehicle, and just 7% say that smoking is allowed when a child is present. Secondly, 78% of adults say that they would support a ban on smoking in cars that have children as passengers. Thirdly, legislation is needed because public awareness campaigns have been shown to be less effective than legislation.

Some common myths need to be dispelled. The adverse effects of smoking in a car are not really helped by opening car windows. That does not reduce second-hand smoke to a safe level, because a car is a very restricted area. Second-hand smoke in cars can be 10 times more concentrated than the level considered unhealthy by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Legislation to ban smoking in cars would be the next logical law-making step.

The highway code already advises against smoking in a car, because it distracts drivers. The Smoking (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 bans smoking in vehicles that carry passengers in the course of paid or voluntary work, including buses, trains, planes and taxis. The next logical step would be to apply that ban to private cars. Let us make the norm the law. I hope that all Members support the motion for the sake of the health of our children and of the nation.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion. It is interesting that no Member who has so far spoken has admitted to being a smoker. We

can assume that smokers continue to be social pariahs. If Members are smokers, they are not admitting it. I am not a smoker, I have to say.

Mr McCallister: I thought that you were going to be the first to admit it.

Mr Brady: No, absolutely not.

It is interesting that we already have legislation that bans young people from purchasing cigarettes. Indeed, there was recent publicity about the PSNI asking young people to participate in an exercise to catch out tobacconists, and so on, who were prepared to sell cigarettes to young people. That has been to the forefront in publicity drives. The proposed legislation would reinforce existing legislation. Mr McCallister made a point about seat belts. If people are stopped or see a checkpoint, they can put on a seat belt very quickly. Smoke can be smelt in a car, so if someone has been smoking recently, it is possibly easier to detect.

There are inherent difficulties in enforcing this type of legislation, and if parents took their responsibilities properly, there would be no need to talk about such legislation. The motion refers specifically to cars. Obviously, it could be argued that children could get out of a car and go into a house in which their parents are smoking. Again, that is irresponsible parenting. If parents are going to smoke in a house with young children present, they are showing a distinct lack of responsibility and should be taken to task for it. The other thing —

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to Mr Brady for giving way. I agree with his point about smoking in the house being irresponsible. However, a car is a very confined space. Most people's houses are significantly bigger than a car. That is why the motion is specific about cars. The message should go out that we should not be smoking in any sort of confined space, even our homes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I was really reinforcing the argument about parental responsibility. Indeed, you do not have to be a parent. If there are young children around — we are talking about children up to the age of 16 — and adults are smoking in the vicinity, it is going to cause problems. Mr Dunne made the point that it is not just lung cancer; there are many respiratory illnesses, strokes and hypertension. All sorts of problems are caused by smoking. Over the years, a huge industry has grown up to encourage people to stop smoking. We have patches, chewing gum, and all sorts. It is a multimillion pound industry, yet, unfortunately, approximately 2,300 people die every year from smoking-related illnesses. Obviously, that campaign is not necessarily working.

The introduction of legislation like this would probably heighten awareness, and that is what it is all about. It is about educating people and getting the message through to them that smoking is bad for your health. It seems to me from personal observation in the street that young girls seem to smoke a lot more than young men, whatever the reason. Obviously, if that is carried through into adulthood, pregnancy, etc, it can cause serious problems. The danger of passive smoking has been proven and talked about over a number of years, so the message has got through, but many people are simply not willing to accept it. It is about education and responsibility. I certainly support the motion.

Mrs McKevitt: As a reformed smoker, I welcome the motion. As the mother of five children, I will do all in my power to protect them, and all children, from the dangers of second-hand smoke. At every opportunity I get, I encourage all young people never to take up the habit. I welcome the debate and congratulate the proposer. I support the motion because I recognise the dangerous health effects on children exposed to second-hand smoke, particularly in a confined space. *[Interruption.]* I wish that John would listen to me when I am talking.

It is right that the Assembly should protect the vulnerable from toxic fumes in order to save lives. This step will build on legislation that has already been successfully implemented and will pave the way for future legislation to protect various other vulnerable groups in society. I welcomed the legislation in 2007 that prevented smoking in the workplace. In my opinion, it not only saved the health service money but, more importantly, saved lives. Then, in 2008, the Assembly increased the age threshold for smoking and purchasing cigarettes from 16 to 18. This motion is another step forward in the fight against nicotine.

Various health groups have demonstrated through research that second-hand smoke is

harmful to the health of those who are exposed to the fumes, adults and children alike. The potential side effects of passive smoking for children include bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma and other respiratory diseases. That has already been mentioned. Some also argue that smoking around newborn children can increase the risk of cot death. Through continued education and by implementing legislation, we can protect young people from these health risks.

A report from the Tobacco Advisory Group tells us that, each year, over 300,000 children in the UK go to their GPs with illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia as a result of being exposed to passive smoking. When we break down those visits and think of this with a pound sign, it is also clear that the Health Department can make huge savings if we take measures to reduce children's exposure to second-hand smoke. Health groups have also carried out research to assess children's exposure to second-hand smoke. Research undertaken by the British Lung Foundation states that more than half of the number of children aged between eight and 15 have been exposed to cigarette smoke in cars.

The positive news is that the majority of people in Northern Ireland welcome the motion. The British Lung Foundation tells us that a survey of more than 1,000 homes in Northern Ireland found that 88% of people support legislation to ban smoking in cars when children are present. Indeed, many smokers welcome the motion. They will often tell non-smokers not to start smoking because they know how difficult it is to quit. I know that only too well myself. Research suggests that more than three fifths of the number of smokers want to quit. I welcome the public awareness campaign to prevent adults from smoking in cars when carrying passengers who are under 16 years of age. I also call on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to continue to educate children on the dangers of smoking in the hope that fewer people will take up the habit and more lives can be saved. The Department should also continue to provide much-needed help to those who are trying to quit smoking.

I hope that today's debate will also encourage smokers to think twice about lighting up around children and non-smokers. I hope that future motions will follow to address the protection of other vulnerable groups in society, such as the elderly, people with underlying health issues, disabled people and pregnant women. Nineteen years ago, when I was pregnant with my first child, the midwife gave me advice on the harm and risks of passive smoking while the baby was in the womb. That advice should now go a step further, with smoking banned in cars when passengers are under 16 years of age. I encourage the Minister of Health to issue leaflets or advertising in that regard immediately. Given the fact the one in every two smokers will die from smoking-related illnesses, that message could not be clearer.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Members who brought forward the motion. First and foremost, I congratulate Karen. I have been a smoker, a non-smoker, and a smoker again. I will admit that freely. However, like Karen, I can speak in the debate with conviction about the vile and disgusting habit of smoking. I do not believe that there is a smoker in the country who would not stand up to say that and to admit that he or she dislikes it. Although we do it, we dislike it. Therefore, I have been there; I stopped but I have started again.

I also wanted to ask Mickey whether his comment about young women was directed at me. I would like to think so. *[Laughter.]*

When we become parents, our natural instinct is to nourish and to protect. That envelops every aspect of our lives. We painstakingly research how to make our homes child-friendly and spend copious amounts of money to satisfy the quest for a safe and secure environment for our children. As MLAs, we are lobbied continually by parents on issues that affect children directly, such as education, child poverty, child protection, internet safety, depression and suicide. Indeed, today, in the Long Gallery, Childline launched its new school service to help children to recognise and to protect themselves from all forms of abuse. Therefore, the Assembly is no stranger to child issues. It takes all issues surrounding the protection of children seriously. I do not believe that any responsible parent would put his or her child's health at risk intentionally. However, through lack of health education, some fail to recognise the consequences of second-hand tobacco smoke in the closed environment of a car.

Unfortunately, it is not just adults who are at risk from the adverse effects of passive smoking. The motion highlights the dangers of second-hand tobacco smoke and the long-

term effects on children's health. As mentioned earlier, research suggests that children are twice as likely to suffer from bronchitis, pneumonia and bronchiolitis when they have been exposed to second-hand smoke. As Ms Boyle stated previously when speaking specifically about second-hand smoke in cars, smokers should be aware of the fact that their children's bodies are still growing and developing, with the effect that their breathing is faster than that of adults and, therefore, they inhale a percentage of the toxic poison that emanates from tobacco smoke.

Statistics show that children who are subjected to second-hand smoke in an enclosed environment are twice as likely to have respiratory and blood disorders. It is important, therefore, that the Assembly supports an education programme that is targeted at smokers in particular and highlights the dangers of breathing in second-hand smoke.

We, as an Assembly, should encourage smokers to ensure that the principle of protection that we follow in all other aspects of our daily parenting is implemented to prevent our children from being exposed to secondary smoke. I support the motion.

4.30 pm

Mr Givan: I support the motion and commend Mr McCallister and Mr Gardiner for proposing it. On the radio this morning, I heard some people very foolishly and irresponsibly suggest that this is not an important issue for the House to be debating. I honestly think that the House should debate and take action on this issue. People who have suggested otherwise should reflect on what they have said. They are trying to score cheap points about the Assembly, but playing politics with an issue as serious as this does them no service or credit whatsoever.

We come to this motion on the basis that a child does not have the same rights as an adult to challenge people who smoke in their vehicles. The House and the Government should always act in a way that protects people who cannot protect themselves. That is what the motion would do.

I have a mild form of asthma, which is usually sports related, but before the ban on smoking in enclosed public places was introduced, my asthma was triggered by somebody smoking near me in a restaurant and it caused me to wheeze. Therefore, I was delighted when the ban came into place. In fact, before I was a member of Lisburn council — although the Health Minister was at that time — it banned smoking in enclosed council premises before the universal ban was introduced. Arguments were put forward then that it would damage business and stop people from going there and hosting conferences and that we should not do it ahead of other areas, and attempts were made to stop it. However, I was proud of the fact that Lisburn council took the initiative and put the ban in place before any other public organisation did so.

This is an opportunity for the Assembly to take action that will pave the way for others to follow. The argument has been put forward that you cannot enforce the ban, but that is wrong. Members have highlighted the fact that the police can detect you for using a mobile phone in a vehicle. Therefore, I think that this issue would be easily enforceable. Obviously, it would create a much bigger problem if you were to take it to the next step and say that you can go into people's homes and deal with it, but excuses cannot be put forward to try to justify doing nothing.

I hear people who are opposed to the ban saying that if you introduce it for this type of issue, where do you draw the line? However, the fact is that, for years, Governments have been legislating on such issues to try to protect their citizens, and we should not stop now. This is an issue that we can take forward and legislate on, and I would certainly support it.

A number of weeks ago, I was coming to Stormont, and a van followed me the whole way from the M1 junction at Lisburn to the Westlink. The van driver did not have his window down, and a four- or five-year-old child was sitting in a child seat, and I am pretty certain that the driver went through three cigarettes in the time that I travelled from Lisburn to the Westlink. When I glanced in the rear-view mirror, I got angry at the fact that that child had to suffer because the adult was smoking in the vehicle and damaging the health of the child, and the child could not stop him. This legislation would give that child the right to be protected from an irresponsible adult smoking in a vehicle.

As my colleague Ms Bradley said, the vast majority of smokers and non-smokers are responsible individuals. However, this motion will put in place a deterrent to try to change

the attitude of the minority of irresponsible smokers, because if you do not have deterrents in society, you will not be able to tackle those people. Whether it is through ignorance or a general lack of responsibility, they will continue to damage individuals. Therefore, you must have a deterrent in order to change the attitudes of people who are reluctant to change.

The motion sets out the right message, and I would support legislation coming forward to bring it into law.

Mr McClarty: Since it is confession time, I will say that I, too, am a reformed smoker. Although I support the spirit of the proposal to protect children from the potentially damaging effects of secondary smoke, I am hesitant to give it my full backing, because I believe that it will be difficult to enforce, it will interfere with parental responsibilities and it will intrude upon freedoms within private space.

Of course, legislation as proposed will be more than difficult to enforce. Although it is relatively easy to pick out someone who is using a mobile phone while driving or someone who is not wearing a seatbelt, it is less obvious whether a person is smoking in a car in the presence of young people under the age of 16. Age is difficult to estimate. Often, children as young as 12 can be taken for twice that age. Must we stop those people to ask for ID or persuade children to turn in the offending smoker, even if that person happens to be a parent?

Although there is evidence that similar legislation has been introduced in other parts of the world, I am curious to know the level of compliance in those places and how the law is actually enforced. I have read that some apply the law to children who are legally eligible for child car seats. That makes the offence more easily visible, but disregards children who are too old for car seats or who have physically outgrown them.

Such legislation suggests an intention of this legislature to assume responsibilities that should remain with parents and guardians. Governments should aim to protect children only beyond the capabilities of parents and guardians. A responsible and informed parent will know not to smoke in the presence of a child, whether in a car or a living room, in order to protect that child's well-being. We do not need a law to tell us to do that. Of course, there will always be parents who flout their responsibilities to their children, but it is not a solution to create laws to ensure good parenting.

It is very disappointing, as everyone agrees, that some adults continue to smoke in an environment where there are children present. I believe that if they are willing to subject children to a smoke-filled confined space in a car, they will have no hesitation in subjecting them to their smoke in the home. Do we then present legislation that bans smoking in the home? Although that would benefit the child, we would be overstepping the mark by invading private lives and space. A private vehicle is as much a private space as a home. Are we, therefore, overstepping the mark here, too?

Mr B McCrea: I just want to check that the Member is seriously advocating that if there is a proven cause of death of young people, and we can take steps to prevent it, that would not rise above civil liberties. They are young people with no decision-making ability of their own. We have a way of preventing death or serious injury, and I am really surprised at you putting forward that argument. I am just checking that I am hearing you right.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McClarty: The point is that it is so difficult to police. We have a law that bans the use of mobile phones while driving, but all Members here, in their travels between their constituencies and this place, see people flouting that law every day. Some here may even have flouted it themselves. Despite the fact that a law is in place, people still use mobile phones in their cars. Of course we have to protect our children, but I suggest that even if a law were put in place, there would still be a large number of people flouting it.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank everyone who has spoken today on this important health issue, particularly the Members who brought the motion before the House.

As Minister of Health in Northern Ireland, the appalling toll of premature death and avoidable illness that is caused by the use of tobacco products is of great concern to me. Despite the significant progress that my Department has made over the past decade, more than 2,300 people die prematurely every year as a result of tobacco use. Thousands more suffer

from illnesses such as cancer, heart disease and respiratory disorders as a direct result of their addiction to cigarettes. Tobacco-related illnesses place a huge burden not just on our health system but on our economy, with the private and public sectors paying for the cost of thousands of sick days taken each year as a result of smoking-related illnesses.

Today, almost one quarter of adults in our society are regular smokers. That rate rises to almost one third among those who work in routine or manual jobs. Although I accept that we have come some way from the late 1960s, when over half of the population smoked, current smoking rates remain far too high compared with those in countries such as New Zealand, where they are as low as 14%.

My Department's new tobacco control strategy, which is due to be published this year, outlines the direction that we intend to take in order to reduce smoking prevalence over the next 10 years. As in the previous plan, the key areas for targeted action will continue to be prevention, with fewer smokers starting the habit; cessation, helping more smokers to quit; and protection from harm caused by second-hand smoke.

Our latest survey figures show that almost one in 10 children aged between 11 and 16 in Northern Ireland are regular smokers. Those children are becoming addicted to using tobacco well before they are at an age at which they can make an informed adult choice. In spite of all the public health messages that advise young people about the dangers of smoking, thousands of them are recruited to the tobacco industry every year. That is why we need to take further action.

Next year, therefore, I will introduce legislation banning the display of tobacco products from the point of sale in shops and the sale of tobacco from vending machines. In addition, I intend to introduce a Bill to the Assembly that will ensure that repeat offenders against the current age-of-sale laws are penalised for selling tobacco to underage children. Members may also be aware of the announcement made last year by the Secretary of State for Health in England on the potential for requiring plain packaging of cigarettes. Consideration is at an early stage; it has already happened in Australia, and my officials will be in close contact with their Department of Health counterparts to ensure that the implications of such a measure for Northern Ireland are fully understood.

Investment in services aimed at helping people to quit smoking has paid off, with the numbers of people accessing them growing year on year. In 2010-11, more than 34,000 people set a quit date — an increase of 44% over the previous year. We must build on that success, and some of the proposed legislative measures that I have outlined will help people in their attempts to quit by reducing the ubiquitous presence of tobacco products. Some eight in 10 smokers have tried, at some point, to quit smoking, with 78% identifying the health issues as the main reason for doing so.

Although prevention and cessation are very important, the focus of today's debate is protection and on how we can protect children from second-hand tobacco smoke while they travel in private vehicles. That is why I was stunned this morning when I heard Chris Ryder saying that the Assembly should not be debating this motion. What could be more important than protecting our children's health? I will not take lectures from people outside who, perhaps, do not care about children's health. We do care, however, and this House should debate the motion, because it is a good one.

Passive smoking is a health issue that I take seriously, particularly when it affects our children. I remember sitting in restaurants with children in a buggy while people beside us smoked several cigarettes between their meals. It was disgusting behaviour by those individuals, but it was something that we could not do anything about at that time. I am thankful that that is not the case anymore, that people cannot do that and that our children are protected. The available scientific and medical evidence demonstrates the clear health risks that are associated with exposure to second-hand smoke. A number of respected organisations around the world, including the World Health Organization, the British Medical Association and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, have all concluded that there is no safe level of exposure.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of second-hand smoke, as they breathe more rapidly and inhale more pollutants per pound of body weight than adults.

The Royal College of Physicians' 2010 report, titled 'Passive smoking and children', affirmed

that children who are exposed to second-hand smoke have an increased risk of asthma, lower-respiratory infections, bronchitis, middle-ear disease, bacterial meningitis and sudden infant death syndrome, as well as general reduced respiratory function. Tell that to the children, Mr Ryder.

4.45 pm

Smoke-free legislation was introduced in 2007, with the aim of protecting people from being exposed to second-hand smoke while in their workplace. In spite of all the naysayers who doubted that the legislation would be successful, it is now recognised as one of the most important public health initiatives for generations. It is also one of the most popular, with more than nine tenths of the population supporting it. Contrary to Ms Boyle's information, the level of compliance has been reassuringly high. The latest figures, which bring us up to the end of June 2011, tell us that 98% of businesses are compliant with the no-smoking requirement.

Mr McClarty: Does the Minister agree that among those who do not comply are people who smoke in their works vehicle? A works vehicle is a place of work, as per the law. Therefore, people are not allowed to smoke in their works van. The majority of those who do not comply are found to be smoking in their works vehicle.

Mr Poots: Quite clearly, they should not be. I will come to that in a moment. I have heard what the Member has said. I am somewhat surprised and disappointed, but this is a democracy, and he is entitled to say what he said. Nonetheless, I vehemently disagree with his point of view on this issue.

Now that that legislation has firmly bedded down, we can turn our attention to other problem areas where people are exposed unnecessarily to second-hand smoke. A number of health and voluntary organisations, including the British Medical Association, Action Cancer and the British Lung Foundation, have been calling for the past couple of years for a ban on smoking in cars when children are present. They have cited recent studies to support their arguments, including one by the University of Aberdeen that showed that smoking in a car exposes children to levels of smoke that compare to levels that were found in bars before smoke-free legislation was introduced. That is scary.

In addition, research that was commissioned by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health in Wales showed that dangerous levels of second-hand smoke remain in a car for at least one hour after a cigarette has been smoked. That is why consideration should be given to banning smoking in all vehicles, not just those that carry children. What is to prevent a parent from smoking on the way to picking up a child from school? The smoke will linger for a full hour after the child has been collected.

The argument for introducing a ban on smoking in cars, to apply to all private vehicles or only to those in which children are present, will be vigorously debated. On the one hand, there is a strong case for wishing to protect children, or even others who are not smoking, from the harm that is caused by second-hand smoke. On the other hand, we have the case that Mr McClarty makes: that this infringes on people's rights, particularly when related to private property. I make no apology: making it more difficult to smoke is a tool to help people to quit smoking. One MLA who recently quit informed me that smoking 40 cigarettes a day for 40 years at £6 a packet at today's cost will have cost him £186,000 over that period. That would pay for something like two daughters' weddings. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wells: I know that the honourable Member has at least one daughter. If he is budgeting to spend £50,000 on her wedding, that will be some send-off. She is a very lucky girl.

Mr McClarty: He is a Minister and you are not. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Poots: I assure Mr Wells that I come from the same school of economics as he does. She will not get that spent on her.

The majority of smokers are reasonable people and, as I indicated, would like to quit. However, in spite of all the awareness-raising activities and educational campaigns, there will always be that small minority of people who will continue to expose children to second-hand smoke in confined spaces. Mr Givan made that case.

A study of 1,000 adults in the UK that was carried out in 2010 revealed that 15% of adults smoked in the car when children were present. Banning smoking in private cars is a somewhat emotive issue. Although there will be many supporters, there will also be a number of people who feel that it is a step too far. That is why I asked officials in my Department in early September to

commence work on an action plan and timeline for developing a consultation package on banning smoking in cars as soon as possible.

The work is expected to be completed next spring. The consultation will seek views from the public on whether a ban should be introduced and, if so, under what circumstances it should apply; that is, whether it should apply to all private vehicles or only to those in which children are present. Views will also be sought on whether my Department should follow the example set by Wales and commit to a comprehensive public awareness campaign in an attempt to change behaviour, with legislation under consideration only if that approach fails.

To ensure that the public will be fully aware of what a ban would involve, my Department proposes to put together a detailed consultation package that will seek views on implementation, enforcement and penalties. To assist the development of the consultation, my officials held discussions with the Department of Justice and local district councils last month and will meet other relevant stakeholders in the coming weeks.

Smoking in work vehicles has been illegal in Northern Ireland since smoke-free legislation was introduced in April 2007. In addition, legislation making private cars smoke-free has been introduced successfully in a number of countries worldwide, including several jurisdictions in America, Canada and Australia. Therefore, we know that banning smoking in cars is achievable. Several other countries, including Wales, the Republic of Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands are also considering similar legislation.

I am glad to see that there is considerable support from Members for banning smoking in cars, and, if the response from the public consultation were to indicate strong support from the people of Northern Ireland, we might be the first region in the United Kingdom to introduce such a measure. In the meantime, through the Public Health Agency, we will focus on encouraging people to voluntarily make their homes and cars smoke-free.

I remind those who would argue against such a ban on the grounds that it is unenforceable of other vehicle-related legislation such as the wearing of seatbelts, which is largely complied with without the need for heavy-handed policing, and of the legislation that was introduced to stop smoking in enclosed public spaces. To those who argue for the rights of people to smoke a legal product on their own private property, I say: what about the rights of their children to breathe clean air?

Earlier, I spoke about the smoking prevalence rates in Northern Ireland. Many of the countries that I mentioned that have already introduced such legislation had considerably lower prevalence rates than us. I am not saying that, in itself, banning smoking in cars would have a dramatic effect on prevalence rates. However, it would add another building block to the wall of measures that has been put in place already. Everything we do with regard to tobacco control is moving us a step closer to de-normalising smoking, and, hopefully, that will result in fewer young people picking up the habit and, therefore, having to kick it at some point. In conclusion, I am in favour of banning smoking in cars, and I look forward to the outcome of next year's public consultation, which, I hope, will show support for legislation in the area.

Mr B McCrea: Most of the Members who have spoken have been in agreement. The point of discussion appears to be on whether it is possible to enforce a ban or whether you should take the approach of winning hearts and minds through a public information campaign. My colleagues Mr McCallister and Mr Gardiner are to be commended for tabling the motion. Mr McCallister has spoken at length on the matter, and even a little bit of that has been in the Chamber.

As Mr McCarthy said, this is a way of getting the message across. Talking about these important issues is out on the radio waves. It is not often that the Minister and I agree, but I agree with him and Mr Givan that the matter is absolutely the business of the Assembly. It is exactly the sort of thing that we should be talking about, and how dare people try to make cheap political points by saying that we should not be talking about this. The message should go back unanimously from all here that we will talk about what is important for our children. That is really important.

I probably take the same position as the Minister on enforcement. Maybe I am overstepping the mark, but I am absolutely 100% against smoking in any shape or form. If it were down to me, I would take the ashtrays out of cars. I would ban all smoking in cars. I would go so far as to say that, in this case, the right to life trumps civil liberties.

We have to be very careful about smoking, which is such an insidious addiction. When you look at how various drugs get you, nicotine is right up there, and is probably the worst addictive drug. We have to address certain issues for the public good. However, there is the issue of whether bans are counterproductive. There are similar issues to do with alcohol or maybe even obesity. Some of us who have been on the safer foods initiative know the challenges of diet. We have to make sure that what we do is not counterproductive and that we do not drive a product underground or make it cool by being so hard on an issue. However, as we move along the route of engaging with the public, we should be explaining why we should not be doing these sorts of things.

We have all heard the statistics. Mrs McKevitt mentioned the advice that she was given 19 years ago. However, it is the case that women exposed to second-hand smoke were 23% more likely to have a stillbirth and 13% more likely to give birth to a child with a congenital heart defect. How can you take the risk if, as the Minister asserts, the effects of smoking can linger for one hour after you leave a car? That is outrageous. Looking at the cost to us as a society, smoking is estimated to cost the NHS alone £2·7 billion or £50 million per week. However, the overall economic benefit is £13·74 billion per year, according to Her Majesty's Government. We have talked in the Justice Committee about serious organised crime and the amount of money involved in tobacco smuggling. The effects are so significant and so large that we have to find some way to deal with it.

The issue with enforcement is that people appear to be making an argument that, just because something is difficult to do, we should not do it. People may ask, "What about speeding?" — I think that was part of the argument made over there — but when people speed, they break the law. Fellow Assembly Members, if the legislation proposed saves just one life, it will have been worth it. The issue is about leading people forward. The evidence put forward by the Minister —

Mr McClarty: Does the Member agree that the Minister's proposal of a blanket ban on smoking in cars would be much easier to police than a partial ban?

Mr B McCrea: I agree. When the consultation comes out, I would support a total ban. That is what is required; it would be easier to enforce and would deal with the lingering difficulties. That is why I challenged the Member earlier. I have a lot of time for Mr McClarty, and I respect his right to put forward an argument. In this case, however, I cannot support his argument. I do not think anybody else here —

Mr McClarty: The Member is misrepresenting what I said. When I began my speech, I said that I support the spirit of the proposal. My issue was the difficulty of policing it. If the Minister is proposing a blanket ban on smoking in cars, I would support that.

The partial ban is much more difficult to police.

5.00 pm

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to the Member for clarifying his position. I am pleased to hear that and would expect nothing less from the Member. We need to find a proper and better way of dealing with this matter.

We should not shy away from dealing with a difficult situation just because it is difficult to enforce. We have to go out and inform people why there is a problem. We must bring our people with us and explain to them the real tragedy that smoking brings, if left unchecked. We must explain to them that young people do not have the decision-making power or authority to change things, which means that we must legislate for their protection. Above all, we must explain to them that smoking is a filthy, rotten and horrible habit that cannot be condoned.

There were some Members — they are not in the Chamber, so I will not mention them individually — who said that they were not having a go at smokers' rights; I have to say that I am. Smoking is not the answer. This is an issue on which there is unanimity, from what I can hear. I did not hear anyone in the Chamber speaking against the motion. We have difficult issues, because there are people who gain employment from smoking and people who retail cigarettes. Smoking is not right: look at the damage that it does. This is a mature debate that we have to have with our society.

I look forward to the legislation that the Minister will bring and the consultation on that. That will no doubt provoke a debate in our society. I will be most interested to see which of us will stand four-square behind the sentiments that have been put forward today. I will be interested to

see who actually listens and speaks about these matters, as they are particularly important.

I have a comprehensive list of all the people who spoke. The contributions were most eloquent, and there was a lot of use of statistics. There were really good contributions to the debate. Sometimes, there is a danger of repetition when we all agree with one another, but different people brought forward different points from their perspective, which added real colour to the debate. We have had a mature and reasonable debate. It was not some limp thing. The Minister introduced an element of passion and energy at the end, which was a good thing. We should all look forward to the legislation, the proposals and the consultation that are coming out tomorrow. I commend my two colleagues for tabling the motion and commend all Members for the spirit in which the debate has taken place. I ask the House to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly recognises the damaging effects of passive smoking; notes that children are particularly exposed to second-hand smoke; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work closely with the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation, in association with a public awareness campaign, to ban smoking in cars carrying passengers under the age of 16.*

Prison Review: Final Report

Mr Deputy Speaker: As two amendments have been selected, there will be one hour and 45 minutes allowed for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and a further 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose, with a further five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Lynch: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly welcomes the final report of the prison review team; and calls on the Minister of Justice to initiate a plan to ensure that the report's recommendations are implemented and that progress is monitored; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that the appropriate scrutiny and accountability mechanisms are in place.*

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an Aire anseo inniu le héisteacht leis an díospóireacht ar an ábhar tábhachtach seo. I welcome the Minister to the House for this important debate. I support the motion.

The review of the Prison Service is one of the biggest challenges that the Minister will face in his role as Minister of Justice, and he does not need me to tell him that. The Anne Owers review is the latest in a series of reports and reviews into the NI Prison Service. I do not wish to rehash details of those now. We should take this opportunity to establish a new beginning for the Prison Service. Suffice it to say that all the reports had a common thread: the Prison Service is not fit for purpose; it is living in a different era; and it is in need of fundamental root-and-branch change.

The Owers report, however, does more than highlight the major problems in the Prison Service. It sets out a clear vision of what needs to be done and emphasises the importance of acting urgently to realise the fundamental changes that are long overdue. In the words of the review team, "incremental improvements are not enough". The momentum must not be lost, and change must not be left to those who have been in charge to date. All the other reports demonstrated that the Prison Service is incapable of implementing even the most modest changes. The service has consistently reacted negatively to external reviews. In the

past year, the Criminal Justice Inspection report showed that the NI Prison Service lacked the capacity to deliver real change on the ground, needed more concerted action in response to critical reports and had a stream of unfinished business and that its action plans limped along. The report also found that the service lacked ownership and that there had been little systematic learning from the recommendations that had been implemented.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice took a similar view, which was that the response by the NIPS to the various inspection reports resulted in the development of paper-exercise policies and action plans but failed to recognise and address the bigger problems underlined in the recommendations. In the latest review, Anne Owers stated that little had changed in the eight months since her interim report. That clearly highlights the fact, Minister, that a completely new approach is needed. Unless an agenda for change is laid out and involves an implementation plan, accountability mechanisms, decisive leadership and, above all, political will, this report will run into the sand like all the others.

Last week, a document outlining an exit package for prison staff was published. It was detailed, with i's dotted and t's crossed. A similarly detailed and comprehensive package is needed throughout the Prison Service. In most walks of life, what gets measured gets done. The Prison Service's programme of change needs dedicated management. Oversight is vital in the monitoring and implementation of each of Owers's recommendations. A dedicated change management team should be put in place urgently and headed by an experienced person who can co-ordinate and oversee the complex change process that is required and report regularly to a steering group and the Committee for Justice. I understand that the complete programme will involve other Departments, particularly the Health Department and the Department of Education. Therefore, a ministerial team should also be established so that it can have an oversight role in the change process. Criminal Justice Inspection should be given additional resources to carry out independent monitoring of outcomes against recommendations and report regularly to the Justice Minister.

The Minister's top priority should be to keep the House updated. I call on the Minister to ensure that this happens. He must take ownership and become the driver in the overall process of management. Leaving it to officials in his Department would result in little change. As I outlined, the NIPS has a history of resistance to positive change. The report also clearly states that the next six months are vital. I agree: a delay would give those with intentions of cherry-picking and a culture of resistance a chance to gain the upper hand, leaving the Minister with even greater challenges.

It is time for action. We have had too many reports. I read that there have been 23 — that must be a record. We are in a new dispensation, so let us move the Prison Service into the 21st century. The Minister asked for support last month, when the review was published. He will have my party's support and, hopefully, that of all parties in the House. However, we will hold him to account to ensure that the Owers review team's recommendations are implemented in full, so that we will not have to come back to the House as another report gathers dust like the previous ones.

I urge all parties to support the motion and amendment No 2. It is in our interest as political representatives to have a modern Prison Service that has public confidence; we should all agree on that. This is a golden opportunity that cannot be allowed to be lost, and the onus is on the Minister to ensure that that does not happen.

Mr Givan: I beg to move amendment No 1: Delete all after "Assembly" and insert

> *"notes the publication of the final report of the prison review team; calls on the Minister of Justice to initiate an immediate public consultation on the report; and further calls on the Minister, following the consultation period, to work with the Executive to agree a way forward."*

I declare an interest: I have family members who have worked and still work for the Prison Service.

Dame Anne Owers's report was produced by academics and practitioners, all of whom are very well meaning individuals. Indeed, I do not think that anyone can deny that a lot of the work that they did was very comprehensive, given the time that it took and the different organisations that were engaged in the process. It is undoubtedly a comprehensive piece of work. However, justification for the continued investment of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money in the Prison Service requires the public

to buy into the process. That is why, as with the previous review of youth justice, for example, our amendment asks for the document to be made public and for the public to be able to have their say. No one should be afraid of what the public have to say on these important issues. The service provided through the Northern Ireland Prison Service requires public support. Some would say that, at times, the services provided to prisoners in the name of rehabilitation are unrivalled by what is available on the outside. Therefore, there needs to be public justification for the expenditure on the Prison Service.

I am all for the rehabilitation and reform of the individual who is incarcerated. Vast amounts of money are spent, and let us ensure that those resources are spent effectively. I believe that quite a number of recommendations in the report will do that, but there are some with which I have great difficulty. We need public support for what is proposed. The law-abiding citizens who campaign on education issues — as I did on Knockmore Primary School earlier today — health issues and so on will want justification for the expenditure on the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

If you ask people whether prison works — I hesitate to suggest it — most will say that they do not think so. It is in addressing that issue that I think the House will differ. Is the solution to move further along the pendulum of rehabilitation and reform, or is it to ensure that a deterrent is put in place in the system to address why prison is not working?

Lord Ashcroft, a founder member and chairman of Crimestoppers, produced a report following an extensive research project and a survey of thousands of people. In it, he states:

> *"If prison doesn't work, they say, make it work. For them, the problem with prison is not that it fails to turn criminals into model citizens, but that it does not deter criminals from breaking the law. As they see it, sentences are too short to begin with because they are determined by the availability of prison spaces, not by the seriousness of the crime. And once an offender has experienced prison life — free board and lodging, with complimentary satellite TV, PlayStation, pool table and gym membership — it is hardly surprising that they seem so willing to go back again and again. That is not to say people think prison serves no purpose. Even short sentences, though offering too little time for proper rehabilitation, give the public precious respite from the ... prolific offenders who are responsible for the majority of crime, and those who repeatedly breach non-custodial punishments."*

The vision behind this report is to make society safer by reducing reoffending, which is a noble objective with which no one in the House will disagree. What the report fails to acknowledge or provide any direction on is how to deal with prisoners who do not conform or engage in any attempt at rehabilitation and, indeed, aggressively challenge the system. No mention was made of those individuals. Anybody in the House who suggests to me that every prisoner is up for rehabilitation is kidding themselves. A system that fails to take that into account will ultimately fail in its entirety.

5.15 pm

The Minister stated that the model prison is one that supports and reflects human rights standards and ethical values. I really wonder about the type of prison service that we want to create. Is it one that gets bogged down in the quagmire of the section 75 agenda, the human rights agenda or the ethical standards agenda, where the victim will ask, "What happened to my human rights? What happened when the perpetrator —"

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: In a moment, if I can develop this. The victim will ask, "What happened to my rights when the crime was committed against me?". When the report is considered, we need to ensure that we never forget the victims in the process.

There is no reflection of individuals who refuse to conform. Recommendation 38 states:

> *"Under-18s should not be held at Hydebank Wood."*

I could not support that recommendation. It is an ideological, human rights agenda-driven objective that is certainly not based on the reality of what happens in prison. I was in Hydebank recently, where there were under-18s who could not be housed in Woodlands because of the difficulties that they present. In one case, when the father of a 15-year-old child came to visit, he attempted to pass the child drugs, even though he was behind a perspex screen. When officers came to stop that happening, the child attempted to break down the perspex barrier and almost did, only for the officers' actions in ensuring that that did not happen. It is brought to my attention repeatedly that there are those under the age of 18, whom many in

the House would define as children, who exhibit all the very aggressive and very challenging characteristics of adults. I could not support the recommendation that all children be put into Woodlands. Indeed, it would be to the detriment of those who are housed in Woodlands to have someone of that disruptive nature there. It would undermine what Woodlands is about. Therefore, I have particular difficulty with that recommendation.

It is important that there be consequences for bad behaviour, and the report does not highlight those consequences. It is important to have something that will act as a deterrent. That applies to those who are inside the prison and those who are on the outside — those either engaged in or considering criminal activity. I have raised this issue before, but why is it that the prospect of going to prison is the number one deterrent for individuals contemplating committing a crime until they have been to prison and then that deterrent value plummets because of their experience in prison? We need a fundamental assessment of why that happens. Do we move to a more rehabilitative approach or — what is needed — a strong deterrent approach, which is clearly absent from the current regime?

The report also highlighted the issue of preferential treatment, which the Minister talked about in his statement with regard to basic regime and those on adjudication, pointing to or implying some kind of religious discrimination in the prison. I put that to Dame Anne Owers, and she said that she did not know what was behind that. In his statement, the Minister spent a considerable time highlighting that and how important equality and rights are and how discrimination should not happen. However, there was no evidence whatsoever to merit the inference that has been drawn by the publication of those statistics. The Minister laboured that point in his statement, and he did a disservice to those who have served in the Prison Service. We need actual evidence to substantiate what was implied by its inclusion. Perhaps then we can have a better-informed discussion on why people are on basic regime or on more adjudication.

I will touch briefly on other recommendations. Statutory time limits require serious consideration, and the issue should not be rushed. The proposal on fine defaulters should be taken forward. They are getting off lightly by spending a couple of days in prison. That will need greater consideration. With regard to full body searches, I put it to Members —

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

Mr Givan: — that they should be very careful in pursuing that approach. The use of drugs and contraband is endemic in prisons. Members need to be careful when trying to change something.

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

Mr Givan: I, therefore, move our amendment. Let us not be afraid of what the public think about this.

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

Mr Givan: The public's view on it may differ from the views of the Minister and others.

Mr A Maginness: I beg to move amendment No 2: Insert at end

> *"and that the implementation process begins without delay and is completed within 12 months."*

The Member who has just spoken leaves me breathless and almost speechless, with his 'Porridge' caricature of prison and the contrast between deterrence and rehabilitation. He is the Chair of the Justice Committee, and he indicated that, in general terms, he was supportive of the report. At least that is what I took out of his speech. However, every sentence that he uttered was a criticism or an undermining of the thrust and substance of Anne Owers's report, which is a culmination of many such previous reports — I think, in excess of 20 — that deal with the urgent reform of the Prison Service since the ending of the Troubles and the ending or supposed ending of a security-type prison system.

It is so difficult to answer in detail the misguided notions that the Member has presented to the House. The Member implied that, in some way, Anne Owers and her colleagues were do-gooders, academics or people who have no reference to the reality of prison life. That defies any sort of logic and any sort of factual position. Previously, Anne Owers was Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales. We all know Paul Leighton; he was a Deputy Chief Constable of the PSNI. He is one of the most experienced officers in the Police Service. Clodach McGrory is a barrister, a

parole commissioner and a former human rights commissioner. Fergus McNeill is professor of criminology and social work at the University of Glasgow; he is the only academic on the team. Phil Wheatley was director general of the National Offender Management Service for England and Wales. A huge amount of experience was brought to the task of trying to reform our out-of-date, ineffective and excessively expensive Prison Service. Of course, the Member did not mention the expense in relation to the Prison Service, but it is an expense that exceeds anything on these islands.

The fact is this: if we have a Prison Service, we want it to work, and we want it to work well. We want to deter people from committing further offences and to ensure that further offences are not committed. We want to secure our society. We want to know that old people and vulnerable people are safe in their home and that young people in the street are not being accosted and attacked and being made the victims of crime. Yes, the way to do that is to deprive people of their liberty; they should be deprived of their liberty in circumstances where that is appropriate. However, it is also essential that people have an opportunity to be rehabilitated so that further offending will not take place. That is the essence of the report.

I and my colleagues — I am grateful to Mr McCartney and his colleagues for tabling the motion — have tabled an amendment that emphasises the need for a time-centred approach to the implementation of the report. It is absolutely essential that we have the discipline of targets and time limits to provide a proper context in which the report can be fully and quickly implemented. The Anne Owers report emphasises the urgent need for implementation, and it suggests that there should not be further delays or procrastination in carrying out reforms. Unfortunately, the hallmark of the Prison Service has been repeated delays and procrastination in relation to the much-needed reform of the system, which has led to a system in which prisoners are neglected and locked down for prolonged periods.

The Member mentioned Hydebank Wood. There, young offenders are kept watching TV and doing nothing for excessive periods, because they do not have proper access to the services that they require to re-educate and skill them to become worthy citizens in our community. That is the problem, and that is why they are watching TV. It is not for pleasure but because of a lack of useful exercise and activities. Hydebank Wood needs to be completely reformed, so that all the skills and education services are administered by external services. Bring them into Hydebank. Clearly, there has been little or no success in rehabilitating those youngsters in prison, and it is necessary for us to bring people in from outside. If the Prison Service cannot operate effectively and cannot deliver the services that are necessary, let others from outside come in and do so. We must have no more of this nonsense whereby people are locked down, so that they cannot commence classes or have a proper period of time in which to skill themselves. The Minister needs to have a specific programme, and he has produced such a programme in response to the Anne Owers report. However, dates and time limits must also be set, and I know that, in his response, the Minister indicated certain time periods. However, those must be specific and precise, and we must also have the discipline of a timetable, because, otherwise, this will drift further.

Some Members want a further public consultation, yet this issue has been discussed for the past decade, and the people outside this Chamber realise that it has been discussed exhaustively. We now have another report, which is the proper culmination of previous reports and brings the critical need for urgent reform to our attention. It is absolutely essential that we move quickly on this. Time is of the essence, and we must seize this opportunity now.

In her report, Anne Owers talked specifically about dealing with the work practices in the Prison Service, which are antiquated and go back to the 1970s. She also talked about addressing the overmanning in the Prison Service. We have one prison warder for every prisoner, which is absolutely absurd. Why should that be allowed to continue? It is necessary that the exit package is implemented quickly, and I know that the Minister, through the Prison Service, has negotiated with the trade unions to permit an exit package that will commence in March of next year.

5.30 pm

That is good, and that is progress, but we have got to stick rigidly to that timetable and we have got to accelerate the process, so that we can see genuine reform. Those people who no longer wish to stay in the service should leave

it as quickly as possible. My party and I support that, and we support the Minister in his attempt to bring about urgent reform. That is essential. We can no longer sit back and say: "Ah well, it'll be all right on the night; it'll sort itself out in a period of time". These issues are too important to be delayed.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, the proposers of the amendments have advanced a number of arguments. I am not yet convinced about the merit of any or all of them. So, as you can see, backed by my entire party, *[Laughter.],* we wait to see exactly what way the debate goes. We will listen with interest to the arguments that are put forward.

I have to say that the report is definitely on the liberal side of the agenda. I look forward to seeing if any of my fellow liberals are going to weigh in on this. The argument has been made, and it is a serious point, that we have to convince the people of Northern Ireland that these proposals are for the better of all concerned. People in general, and specifically those who have been victims of crime, need to be reassured that any steps that we take here will result, hopefully, in a reduction in crime, the number of criminals in prison and, potentially, even the cost —

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member accept that the present system has produced an excess of repeat criminal behaviour and that given that that is the present position, it is better to move to a new, reformed position, in which reoffending may significantly reduce?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr B McCrea: Yes, I accept the argument put forward by Mr Maginness. I think that change is required. Certainly, there are deficiencies in many areas. In fact, those prison officers and others who are involved in the issue and to whom I have spoken have indicated that they would like to see change. It is worth putting on the record that many good people are prison officers who work really hard and who would like to see change. Thank goodness for reinforcements, Mr Kinahan. Such people would like to see change, because the job of a prison officer or any of the other support staff is pretty difficult.

A Member who cannot be here today said to me that going to prisons and seeing what it is actually like inside them changes your opinion. In the past four weeks, I have been to three prisons, and each trip has informed my thinking. That is part of the reason why there is some difficulty with the consultation process. Prison is such a specialised and expert area that it needs people with background experience to investigate it diligently and come forward with recommendations.

It is important to say that it was put to me that some people think that this is just an exit strategy for Protestants, in much the same way as there was a change to the police. People are worried about whether that is the agenda here. So, I think that we have to reassure people that we are making a real attempt to change the service because it is too expensive; that the type of prisons that we had in the past are no longer appropriate for the future; and that there is a better way of doing things. Nevertheless, we should not hide behind issues: we should confront them.

I am also conscious of the exit package on offer to prison officers. The first thing to say is that it should not be coercive. It should be an option for those who feel that having considered their personal circumstances, they want to move on.

People who wish to stay should stay, and they should be respected and get the training and support necessary to help them to get through what will, undoubtedly, be a changing environment. I also have to say that a change manager is required. There will be so much work on a day-to-day basis that, frankly, it will be difficult to manage the whole thing. So a change manager with a change plan, which is properly costed and in which all the issues are brought out, will go a long way towards making the service more successful.

The issue with the DUP amendment, which other Members might address, is that there should not be too much delay. The trouble is that reports in the past have just sat on the shelf. As Alban Maginness said, it is clear that we need to make some changes — the question is which changes — so we have to make sure that we do not delay unnecessarily. However, we do not want to move precipitously and do the wrong thing.

I am not convinced about a number of issues. On the argument about whether everybody should be in the juvenile justice centre at Woodlands, I think that offenders should be in the most appropriate establishment to deal with what the risk assessment says is the issue. That is not

an age-related issue. In other areas, such as supervised activity, more pilots should be run. Nevertheless, my party is convinced that the report produced by Dame Anne Owers is a fine piece of work.

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

Mr B McCrea: We are interested in moving forward. We want to be progressive and to reassure the public that we are doing the right thing. We reserve our position at the moment.

Mr Dickson: The debate is not just about reform of the Prison Service but about what we want for our society in 21st-century Northern Ireland. At this milestone, it is important for us to remember the sacrifices made by our Prison Service over the past 40 years. At this time of remembrance, it is important that we remember the sacrifice made by prison officers. We must also remember and continue to provide support for the victims of crime, whom other Members mentioned. Those negatively affected by crime must be helped to deal with their experiences and to rebuild their lives. When considering major changes in the way in which we deal with offenders, it is appropriate that we recognise the needs of victims. I welcome the Department's continued efforts in those areas.

The report makes clear the real need for change in our prison system, particularly in the way in which we deal with offenders. It is evident that punishment is needed. It is also evident that to prevent reoffending, prisoners need to be supported. That is for the sake of not only the individual but society as a whole. Many prisoners suffer from serious mental health and other health issues, substance addiction and other problems that contribute significantly to offending behaviour. If unaddressed, those problems will lead to reoffending and further cost to the system. That does not even take into account the appalling suicide rate of prisoners and our failure to prevent that situation. Rehabilitation, therefore, needs to be at the centre of any future strategy. I welcome the recommendations in the report and the efforts made so far to make those in health and social care and in employment and learning work more closely with the criminal justice system, as others have said. We, of course, also need to deal with those who refuse rehabilitation.

Before discussing the amendments, I would like to commend the Members who tabled the motion for highlighting the importance of effective oversight, in which the recommendations of the report are grounded. That is important in our Prison Service, as it is in other areas of the justice system, and will help to create the public confidence needed.

The DUP amendment calls for immediate public consultation on the report. As other Members said, I do not think that that party appreciates the report's sense of urgency. We must remember that, as already highlighted, it was written by people with expertise. It is important that things are done properly and that the public have confidence in the reforms being taken forward.

We should, therefore, consult on the aspects of the report that justify it, such as legislative measures to reduce delay. However, consulting publicly on everything would simply delay urgently needed reform and perhaps serve to cloud the situation further. Similarly, it is important that the Executive agree on the cross-cutting aspects. However, the majority of the report's recommendations are not cross-cutting, and given the urgency stressed in the report, we have an opportunity to press forward with those.

I will move on to the SDLP amendment. Although I share the SDLP's enthusiasm about reforms being implemented swiftly, we must ensure that they are implemented carefully and properly to balance the way in which the report is moved forward. The scale of the required prison reform is already being compared with the Patten reforms for policing. We know that those changes did not take place in such a short time frame. Setting aside 12 months for completion would mean settling for less reform than is needed, which I cannot support. The current strategic efficiency and effectiveness (SEE) programme has lasted for four years. A 12-month completion date is like trying to bulldoze through the reforms in one quarter of that time without appropriate care and thoroughness. The public would not thank us for that.

The importance of the report cannot be overemphasised. It is long overdue and will benefit our society as a whole by helping to reduce reoffending and by providing a modern, caring prison service that not only deals with those in prison but reassures victims of crime about safer communities. For the reasons that I have outlined, I support the motion and oppose both amendments.

Mr Weir: The debate has key three issues: process, content and timing. A number of questions need to be posed. Is reform or change needed? Yes, they are. The fact that events have moved on and the levels of costing disparities, albeit some of them justified, clearly show that some reform is necessary. That is why we have proposed our amendment and rejected the SDLP amendment. We have one opportunity to get this right, and the details are important. It is not the sensible way forward to stagger headlong into accepting and implementing the report in its totality.

The report has good parts. Members have highlighted the emphasis that is placed on increased collaborative departmental working. There has been a silo mentality, and, in the past, the Department of Health and the Department of Education have not had their full input. Although I have some reservations, the package seems to be reasonably well pitched to current prison officers. I have one caveat: if there were to be changes in personnel in the Prison Service, we cannot simply afford to divest ourselves of all those with experience. That would not be helpful.

The proposers of the second amendment have highlighted the qualifications of those who compiled the report; I do not doubt those qualifications. The fact that people have experience does not mean that they have been granted magical powers of infallibility or that any report should be treated as holy writ.

That brings me to the key elements of the report. Some of the parties opposite tell us that we should not consult in any way. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Alliance Party seems to have an imaginative solution that rejects full consultation and no consultation but instead suggests a halfway house. There has been no public consultation on the report, so it is not an issue of further consultation. Are we saying that we cannot trust people's opinions on the report? That is the implication. If we want community buy-in, we must have proper levels of consultation.

I agree with Basil McCrea about timing. We are not talking about undue delay, but neither should we be precipitous. This is our one bite of the cherry and we must make sure that we get prison reform right. The SDLP amendment, which time bounds the consultation to a relatively short period, is a foolish way forward.

5.45 pm

I have to say that although there are a lot of elements in this report that all of us can accept, as has been highlighted, there are elements that some of us have difficulty buying in to. I do not think that it properly tackles an acceptance that some people can be serial reoffenders, as the proposer of the amendment says. The way to tackle those people is absent from this report.

Similarly, I have grave reservations about recommendation 2, which would set statutory time limits between arrest and disposal. There is no doubt that quicker access to justice is something that, broadly speaking, most people would welcome. If we can get cases to court and have them dealt with, that is to the advantage of those who are accused and, indeed, of the victim. However, setting a statutory time limit would inevitably rebound on us. We would be left in a situation where the more complex cases would take longer to get to court. Are we simply going to release some of the most serious offenders on to the streets because they have not met a statutory time limit?

Similarly, a one-size-fits-all approach has been mentioned, and recommendation 38 deals with under-18s at Hydebank. Again, as Mr McCrea indicated, that recommendation should operate on the basis of risk assessment. A blanket proposal that says simply that no one under 18 should go to Hydebank is unacceptable.

There are elements in this report that it would not be right to move forward. We have to make sure that we get the detail right. That is why simply —

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

Mr Weir: Simply giving carte blanche to this report, without having a critical examination, a public consultation and, indeed, an examination of what needs to move forward, because we need to get this right —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up

Mr Weir: Simply giving a tick to this is not acceptable.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, oppose the DUP amendment and, obviously, want to look at the SDLP amendment in the spirit that it has been offered. My main reason

for opposing the DUP amendment is that I see it as a delaying tactic. It is not that we do not trust people in the community and their views; that is very much not the case, and I do not think that anyone is saying that. It is the very fact that, as someone mentioned, there have been something like 23 reports on the prisons here. Really, we need to be doing something now about the reform that is needed, not delaying it again by putting it out to consultation.

Members raised a few points here. In the short time that I have, I want to specifically concentrate on women prisoners and young offenders. The economics of the whole situation have been mentioned again. I think that someone from the Benches opposite said that the cost of keeping prisoners in prison is down to the television sets, activities, and so forth that they have. I think that the real cost is the staffing ratio and the security mentality that is still in the prisons. That is where most of the cost comes from.

It is really important to state that this report again illustrates and highlights the need for a small, purpose-built prison for women, not a prison within a prison, as is the case in Hydebank. We need to take that forward. It is also worth talking about fine default, because somebody mentioned it earlier. That is another issue that will, hopefully, be coming through the Assembly very soon. Over half the women who went to prison in 2010 were there for non-payment of fines. That is a very important statistic. Also, most women who go to prison do not reoffend when they come out. We need to look at why we send so many women to prison.

When you send women to prison, you are not just imprisoning those women; you are having an impact on their families as well, particularly if they are the carers for their children, single parent families, and so on. We need to be looking at why, in 2010, over half the women who were put in prison were there for fine default. We have to understand that many people cannot pay fines now. When a fine is set in court, a person's ability to pay it needs to be considered. Often, it is not the case that the person does not want to pay the fine but that he or she simply cannot pay it.

I have to agree that offenders who are under 18 years of age should be moved to Woodlands. I have visited female prisoners and young offenders in Hydebank Wood. Mr Maginness is correct to say that young people in prison need activity. They need to set their minds to tasks and to have activities to do during the day. In places such as Hydebank, it is very clear that that is not the case. People are locked up for far too long in all prisons. There should be controlled movement.

Someone mentioned full body searches. In the past, strip searches, as I would rather call them, have been used in prisons to humiliate and to degrade prisoners. That can sometimes be the case even now. We must look at that issue as well. We cannot simply ignore it.

When we look at the report, it is important that we see its aims. We are trying to move into a new era. We are trying to look forward. Prison reform is needed. We must look beyond the security aspect of prisons. When we look at controlled movement, for example, there is no reason why prisoners cannot be out of their cells for longer periods. There is no reason whatsoever why prisoners should be locked up as punishment and denied association with other prisoners.

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

Ms J McCann: Reform needs to be brought forward. To put the matter out to consultation will only delay reform. It needs to be done now.

Mr S Anderson: I oppose the motion and amendment No 2. I speak in support of amendment No 1, which my party tabled.

I am not opposed to the reform of the Prison Service. Indeed, all organisations, especially those in the public sector, should reform, modernise and adapt constantly to changing circumstances and times. However, that is not the aim of the motion or the SDLP amendment. They demand to proceed with indecent haste. They seek to ride roughshod over the Assembly's established and agreed scrutiny arrangements. In short, they are a recipe for making a mess of prison reform.

Of course, the motion and amendment No 2 come from the very same people who campaigned for the destruction of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. What was the result of that? Ten years later, the Police Service still suffers from the loss of much valuable policing experience. Although I pay tribute to the work of the PSNI, the loss of the RUC was a blow

from which we have never quite recovered. We must not make same mistake with reform of the Prison Service.

It is worthwhile noting that the Sinn Féin Members who tabled the motion have very particular experience of prison. The Assembly should be careful about taking guidance on prison reform from anyone who was convicted of terrorist-related offences. Let us not forget that during the long years of the Troubles, terrorists murdered prison officers and left others and their families scarred and traumatised. The Prison Service deserves a debt of gratitude. The exit package that is being proposed for prison officers is a step in the right direction. However, we must always remember the suffering and sacrifice of prison officers and their families over many decades. Any final settlement will need to take that sacrifice into account. Prison officers have been in regular contact with me, and I will do all that I can to ensure that they are treated in a dignified and respectable manner.

The SDLP amendment argues for even faster implementation of reform. That has been further reinforced by Mr Maginness in the debate. The report of the prison review team was published just a few weeks ago, on 24 October 2011. It makes some radical and controversial statements and proposals. This debate is not the time to go into them. That is not the subject of the debate. It is about the speed of reform. The motion and the SDLP amendment conveniently ignore the complexities of the issues and the overriding need to get reform right.

Napoleon Bonaparte said:

> *"Order marches with weighty and measured strides. Disorder is always in a hurry."*

That is the danger in the motion and in the SDLP amendment. Our amendment recognises the need for an ordered, balanced and rational assessment of the report and for wide-ranging debate on the issues. It also recognises the role that must be played by the devolved institution and the general public. We can and will support some of the recommendations in Dame Anne Owers's report, but we have considerable difficulty with others, and we will not be rushed. As a party, we will take our time, and we will consult.

All the recommendations need to be carefully considered by the Justice Committee, the Assembly and the Executive. That is only right and proper. We feel very strongly that there should be a period of public consultation. That is vital, especially bearing in mind the significance of what is being proposed.

Our priority at all times must be to protect the victims of crime and to support a robust criminal justice approach to the perpetrators. That will do much more to help to restore public confidence than what is being proposed by Sinn Féin and the SDLP. I know that the Minister is keen to keep the process moving, and I fully understand that we cannot stand still, but I hope that he will not be swayed by the arguments of Members opposite.

Shakespeare said:

> *"To climb steep hills*
>
> *Requires slow pace at first:"*

We are embarking on radical reform. The hill is steep. Let us take our time. Let us get it right. I oppose the motion and amendment No 2 and commend amendment No 1 to the House.

Mr McCallister: My colleague Mr McCrea has summed up more than I could ever put into words on this important subject. *[Laughter.]*

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Yes, I am happy to give way.

Mr Weir: I wonder whether the Member is looking for an early release from this motion.

Mr McCallister: Yes, I might well be, but I want to hear the other intervention.

Mr B McCrea: I thank my party's deputy leader for turning up to give me moral support and to say that we are listening intently and following every single move that people are making and the arguments that are being put forward in what is a very important area. The issues have been brought forward, and we will make a serious decision at the end of the debate.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to my colleague for that. I was almost waiting for Mr Anderson to challenge the Minister by using his Shakespeare lines and saying, "To reform, or not to reform: that is the question." I suppose the debate is probably over the speed at which we reform.

Mr McDevitt: I did not expect to be on my feet so quickly.

This is one of those debates where we appear to discuss an issue as if the past 15 years had not happened, or as if the past 15 years should not have happened. It begs a basic question about who the real prisoners in this debate are. Are they the many people whom we lock up for fine default only to release them two days later? Are they the boys? In response to Mr Givan, I do not know any other way of describing someone who has not reached the age of maturity. I do not know whether there is a debate about the fact that if you are under 18, you are simply not an adult — not in this United Kingdom, as Mr Givan would like us to refer to this place, not in this European Union, not even, as far as I am aware, in this civilised world. I do not think that they are the real prisoners in this debate. I think that the real prisoners are behind some bars on that long Bench over there. They are prisoners of their own past: prisoners of a rhetoric that has run out of steam and of an argument that has run out of any sense of validity. They are out of touch with their community. I can say that with absolute confidence because when you have the great privilege of representing a constituency like mine, you meet many people from the community that the party opposite purports to represent.

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

This is not a touchstone issue in that community. What is a touchstone issue is whether we find the courage in ourselves and in this House to reform everything around us in the spirit of the mandate that the people have given us through the Good Friday Agreement and through the subsequent agreements and elections.

6.00 pm

The real issue is blatantly obvious: a system that is no longer fit for purpose. It is a system that, tragically, is still riven with inequalities, which were starkly exposed in the report by Dame Anne Owers and her team. They are inequalities that remind us that if you are of one religious denomination and are in prison, you are nearly eight times more likely to be on a low regime than if you are of another denomination. They remind us that if you are young and from a socially deprived background, you are so much more likely to find yourself in an inappropriate care regime in the wrong type of custodial environment and, frankly, having your destiny predetermined by others, and not in a positive way, or a way that is likely to give you a second chance or mean that you leave whatever arrangement you have been committed to in a stronger place, but the opposite. It is a system that condemns you to repeat your mistakes.

It would be very positive if we broke out of our cages and closed mindsets and stepped into some of the hard and sad realities that the report presents us with and faced up, as mature legislators, to addressing them. Colleagues quoted many people today. I am always struck by Martin Luther King, who used to speak about the "fierce urgency of now". It is about knowing that there are times when you have to move, even if it means moving out of a comfort zone and into a new space. In moving, you do not just make life better for those who have been advocating change; you make life better for everyone. The time has come for this House to embrace the fierce urgency of now.

Lord Morrow: Listening to some of the speeches, I wonder what planet some people are on. It strikes me that there are people who just do not get it; I do not care how many reports come out or how much they hear, they will still not get it. I listened intently to a very animated Mr Maginness, who blamed society for every prisoner who is put away. He spoke of how the prison regime has failed everybody, how society has failed those people so that they now end up in prison, and when they go into prison, there are no facilities for them. They cannot do any work; they have no recreation, no libraries and no books to read. There are absolutely no facilities.

Mr McDevitt chastised these Benches for being out of touch. We just happen to have around three times the number of seats that his party has but we are still out of touch.

Mr McDevitt: On this issue.

Lord Morrow: On this issue, he says that we are out of touch. We have had about 20 reports on prison reform, how and why the prison regime is not working and why it does not produce. Some Members opposite are former inmates; they have tasted the system and seem to have come out of it quite well. They look healthy enough to me, and I suspect that when they were there, they used the facilities to educate themselves and to ensure that they got the very best from it. Yet we are told that it is still not good enough.

I am not going to be disparaging of the authors of the report, because I believe that they have been sincere. However, there are omissions

in the report. Whether that is deliberate or unintentional, I am not sure. However, nowhere in the report do its authors make proposals to change things. They simply say that the whole prison regime has failed, that it is not fit for purpose and it should no longer exist.

The report does say that what happens inside prison reflects what happens outside it, and that is true. We have had police reform; we all remember that. In the past, through the Belfast Agreement, courtesy of Mr McCrea's party, the gates of the prisons were flung open, and it was said that the way to deal with prisoners was to let them all out, send them home and tell them to have a good time. There is no indication —

Mr A Maginness: Did they reoffend? *[Interruption.]*

Lord Morrow: Did they reoffend? I thought that Marian Price was let out and put back in again. She is locked away again.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: I will, because the Member is obviously going to tell me about others.

Mr A Maginness: No, no. I am obliged to the Member for allowing me to comment. In fact, very few of those who were released under the Good Friday Agreement — out of I do not know how many hundreds of prisoners — reoffended. Does that not mean something? Does that not indicate that that programme of early release was, in fact, a proper one?

Lord Morrow: Mr Maginness fails to deal with the hurt and offence that that caused to the innocent victims; that is grossly missing from the report. I am not saying that there cannot be prison reform — I am not saying that at all — but let us make it clear by sending a message from this elected House that we have respect for victims, that we have a care and a concern, and that we strenuously believe that if you do the crime, you must do the time. I know that that is a cliché and that it is a bit worn out, but it still stands very true today. An open-prison regime that concentrates solely on the rights of the prisoner or the criminal and gives little or no regard to those who have suffered at the hands of those people will not stand the test of time.

There are those on the opposite Benches who look through rose-tinted glasses and say that criminals are not such bad people after all and that we must ensure that they have their plasma TVs and their comforts. I could read out a reply that the Minister gave me about the comforts that have been provided for prisoners such as Dolours Price — if that is her name — and Marian Price and the money that has spent on the comforts that have been given to her to ensure that her human rights have been maintained. There is no talk of the human rights of her victims or those who have suffered at the hands of those criminals — not at all. They are surplus to requirements; they are just a figure in the background.

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

Lord Morrow: If we are to change our prison system, let us ensure that we take the public with us and that we do not ride roughshod over them as we did with the Patten proposals.

Mr Allister: A report of such length is bound to contain some positive matters, and so it does. However, its overall preponderance does not point the way to a better, more effective Prison Service. There has been much talk about why prison exists. Of course, it has and should have a rehabilitative effect and purpose but, first and foremost, prison is for punishment. You go to prison because you have offended against the law and deserve to go to prison. When you go to prison, you are there, of course, to see whether you can be rehabilitated but, first and foremost, to be punished for the crime that you have committed. It is the total absence of deterrents that hallmarks this report.

When you go through, for example, what the review team says are the desirable criteria for recruiting staff, the focus is on staff who understand prisoners, who will work with prisoners and who will accommodate prisoners. That is all very beneficial in its place, but it is not the primary objective of a prison regime.

You do not have to go very far into the report — only to page 9 — to find its political aspect. You read that prisons have political importance. It states:

> *"That is why this review was a key part of the Hillsborough Agreement".*

Some who are uneasy with what the report contains should remember that they helped to bring the review about by agreeing to it as part of the Hillsborough agreement. Their fingerprints are all over it, in that regard. The

report states that the review was a key part of the Hillsborough agreement and:

> *"it is why the reform of the prison system, like the reform of policing, is an essential part of the move to a normalised society".*

What do those words mean? We all know about the reform of policing. It had certain key components. Will the same key components be part of the reform of the Prison Service? One of the key components of the reform of policing was an exit strategy to reduce the number of Protestants in the service. Is that subtle language, which states that the reform of the Prison Service must be "like the reform of policing", being used to cover that?

We also know that the reform of policing involved a name change. Are we going to have a name change of the prisons? Are they no longer going to be Her Majesty's prisons? Perhaps the Minister, in replying, will confirm to us most robustly that that will not happen. I will listen with interest to see whether he does. Like the reform of policing, is the badge of the Prison Service to be changed? Is the crown to go? Let us hear from the Minister a robust denial that that will be any part of the agenda. When we read that the reform of the Prison Service must be like the reform of policing, alarm bells ring very loudly indeed. We wait with interest to see whether that is part of the machinations that are afoot.

It is no surprise, of course, that those who peopled the prisons and used them as colleges of terrorism should be the chief cheerleaders for a report that would radically reform the prisons, like the police were reformed. It is no surprise at all that their agenda continues to be the utter destruction of the Prison Service, which has been staffed by very brave people who faced the violence and terrorism of the IRA. We had to remember many of them at the weekend because of that. There are too many in the House who would trample on those memories as part of their political agenda —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Allister: — to destroy the Prison Service.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am grateful for the opportunity to engage in debate on what I regard as a landmark report by the prison review team. In making his proposing speech, Seán Lynch highlighted that it is one of the key challenges for my Department. I do not disagree with him in that respect.

On one level, the report is about the sort of prison system that we should have and the steps that we now need to take to realise that. The case for the transformation and modernisation of the Prison Service has been well made by many commentators over the years. There are no longer any reasonable grounds on which the need for reform can be denied. On another level, however, there is a more significant issue underlying the report, which affects all of us in the Assembly and all those whom we represent. The fundamental question is: what approach should this society take to those who offend most seriously against its rules? I am clear that there needs to be punishment and that there are some cases where the crime or risk factor requires that punishment in the form of a custodial sentence might genuinely be for life, or the vast majority of a life. However, those are the exceptions.

6.15 pm

We also need a society that enables, encourages and supports those who have done wrong to play a positive and meaningful part in the future. That process has to start during an individual's time in prison and, crucially, it must be sustained in the period after. That is the key message permeating the review team's report. Dame Anne Owers and her team have emphasised that rehabilitation needs to be the core purpose of custody. The report is clear that custody should only ever be used as a last resort, and my Department is already working on a range of measures aimed at ensuring appropriate responses to the different levels of offending.

The report has also highlighted that our prisons do not and should not operate in isolation and that there is a need for collaboration with others, whether in the wider justice system, across other Departments or with partners in the third sector. Collaboration on healthcare, employability, education, learning and skills and other springboards to rehabilitation are all needed for a successful approach to reducing reoffending. I am pleased that the Executive have acknowledged the role that wider government must play in assisting in reducing offending. In the months ahead, I will work with ministerial colleagues to define clearly what more needs to be done in light of this and other reports to integrate properly the social and economic responses to offending with those of the justice system.

The amendment that has been tabled by Paul Givan and his colleagues calls for the initiation of immediate public consultation on the report. In reaching their conclusions, Dame Anne and her team have already consulted widely. The prison review team report is the last in a long line of reports to highlight the need for fundamental reform across the Prison Service and to underline the issues of governance, culture, size, working practices and many more that need to undergo radical change. Clearly, there are a number of recommendations, such as those proposing the introduction of statutory time limits or a presumption against custody, on which I would need to consult further. Implementing those recommendations would require legislation and so go beyond my powers as Minister. On those, I will come back to the Justice Committee and the Assembly for further consideration on the way forward.

I share the opinion of the review team that the broad sweep of the path ahead is absolutely clear. The challenge for us now is to follow it and to make progress as a matter of urgency. That is why, although individual recommendations may be subject to further consultation, I do not propose to initiate a period of public consultation on the report itself. Further delay would be damaging to the need for urgent action or, as Conall McDevitt referred to it, "fierce urgency".

The report also makes clear that there is an implementation role for wider government and that reducing offending should be a shared responsibility across the Executive. I agree with that view, and I look forward to working closely with colleagues in the coming months. However, given that the majority of recommendations are not cross-cutting in nature but fall exclusively within the remit of my Department — whether NIPS or the Department as a whole — there is no need under the ministerial code for me to agree with the Executive a way forward on the implementation of those recommendations. That is why I must oppose amendment No 1.

I take the prison review team report extremely seriously. I want to make it clear to the Assembly that work to implement the report is under way. For example, arrangements are in place already for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to work in partnership with NIPS on the nine recommendations relating to healthcare, where it has shared responsibility. Last week, we launched the staff exit scheme, which will allow a significant number of staff to leave with dignity and will pave the way for the Prison Service to be not only right-sized but refreshed.

The staff exit scheme marks a pivotal moment in the programme of reform for the Prison Service, allowing the pace of change to quicken and ushering in further critical changes over the coming months. The focus of NIPS is already visibly changing from a service that is centred around security to one that has at its heart the rehabilitation of offenders. As the report recommends, NIPS has already changed its corporate structure to establish a directorate that is wholly focused on offender services.

I turn to the amendment that was tabled by Alban Maginness and his colleagues. I welcome SDLP Members' acknowledgement of the urgency of reform, and I commend their eagerness to press ahead with implementing the changes that have been recommended. I share that sense of urgency and I am committed to doing all in my power to drive forward the reforms.

As I said before, change on this scale will not happen overnight nor, if it is to be truly effective and lasting, will it be completed within the next 12 months. Indeed, reference has already been made to the length of time taken for the PSNI reforms.

The SEE programme, through which NIPS will deliver change, is a four-year programme. Through each year of that programme, the process of change, with all its complex interdependencies, has been mapped out. In this, the first year, the focus is on preparing for structural changes and laying the foundations on which further reforms of structures, working practices and culture will be built.

We cannot afford to lose the momentum of change. Indeed, I believe that over the next six months, we will see the pace of change quicken significantly. Nonetheless, it is important that the process is done right and is done thoroughly. The reforms envisaged by the review team simply could not be implemented within 12 months, and that is why I cannot accept the amendment, although I entirely agree with the thinking behind it.

Again, I reassure Members that work is under way, with many recommendations already incorporated into the detailed implementation plan for the SEE programme or included in ongoing reforms of the wider justice system. Of the 40 recommendations that the review team

made, 28 fall exclusively to my Department to take forward. Of those, one has been achieved, and work has commenced or is well-advanced on 20 more.

As the review team said, the next six months will be crucial, and I anticipate that by the end of that time, a further nine recommendations will be fully implemented, with a number of others expected to follow. In light of that, I hope that the SDLP Members will not press their amendment.

Underpinning the recommendations of the report is the issue of proper and robust oversight. We cannot afford to allow the review to result in a report but no progress, as is said to have happened before. That is why I have tasked officials with developing an oversight mechanism. I will personally take the chair for examining that mechanism, and I will involve others from outside with independent representatives or NIPS non-executive directors. I have met the chief inspector about the role that CJINI needs to play in supporting those arrangements, and he is fully committed to be a part of, and inform, the oversight process.

In relation to recommendation 9, which puts forward proposals for random reviews of SPAR documentation, I have had discussions with the chief inspector and the Prisoner Ombudsman to ensure that ongoing arrangements to implement that recommendation are put in place as quickly and effectively as possible. To that effect, the Prisoner Ombudsman and chief inspector have agreed that CJINI, which has an established role of providing quality assurance across the justice system, is best placed to carry out those reviews, which will be informed by the Prisoner Ombudsman's own analyses of SPAR documentation. I welcome the review team's emphasis on the importance of oversight. The new oversight mechanism will reinforce the complex network of scrutiny bodies that is in place and to which NIPS is already subject.

As I noted, the challenge of reducing offending goes much wider than my Department and is the shared responsibility of the entire Executive. I welcome Dame Anne's recommendations that these important cross-cutting reforms should be overseen at the highest level, and I will consider further with my Executive colleagues the best way to take that forward.

Members highlighted a number of points in the report. Reference was made to fine defaults. I assure Jennifer McCann that plans are well under way on the community-based alternative to fine default; supervised activity orders. Stewart Dickson talked about vulnerable prisoners and Alban Maginness talked about the need for learning and skills. I remind them that, last week, I opened the Donard day centre and the learning and skills centre at Maghaberry with the full support of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the Minister for Employment and Learning. I entirely accept the point that Alban Maginness made about the need to bring the standards at Hydebank Wood up to those now in operation at Maghaberry.

Jennifer McCann highlighted women offenders, where there is clearly a significant issue of dealing with the estate and the difficulties of working with Ash House in Hydebank Wood, although we should also take note that the report highlighted constructive and innovative work being done with women offenders, for example in the Inspire project. Peter Weir spoke about removing under-18s from Hydebank Wood. In the past 12 months, 12 young people were moved from Hydebank Wood to Woodlands as a result of case conferencing and examination of their best needs. So, only eight remain at this stage. Those are signs of small change and of the fact that we are moving in the right direction.

Several Members mentioned the exit scheme for prison staff. I repeat to Sydney Anderson that I believe that the scheme is devised in a way that will allow those who wish to leave to do so with dignity. Indeed, the union representatives have reflected that. I restate to Basil McCrea that the scheme is not to be compulsory; it is a voluntary scheme. In answer to Peter Weir's concerns about denuding the service, I should say that if we are looking for something like 500 out of 1,800 staff to leave, many with experience will remain.

Basil McCrea also highlighted the importance of having a dedicated change management team. Unfortunately, that has been delayed by some of the appointment processes, but it is well under way and will play a key part in ensuring that the change can happen. I acknowledge the issue that existing staff have with the working responsibilities and the need for that additional team of four people to deal with it.

Jim Allister referred to some extent to symbols and titles as they apply to the Prison Service. Those are operational issues for the Prison

Service, but I believe that if NIPS is serious about fundamental and end-to-end structural and cultural reform, it cannot fail to consider the symbols and emblems that are visible signs of the organisation's culture and focus. That is one of a range of operational issues that I will be expecting NIPS to consider as part of the change process over the coming months. NIPS has to deliver a transformation of its culture and it cannot move forward unless it addresses those sorts of issues along with others relating to staffing and estates, and so on.

Mr Allister: So that we are absolutely clear, is the Minister saying that he anticipates an end to our prisons being called "Her Majesty's prisons" and that he anticipates an end to the crown being part of the symbol of the Prison Service? Will he be clear on that? If he is saying those things, I want to tell him that there are many in the unionist community who will be appalled at the direction in which he is taking us.

Mr Ford: I think that it is a pity that we are getting hung up on symbols. It is the only issue that anybody has wanted to intervene on during my speech this afternoon. I said that we are looking at a process of fundamental and end-to-end reform that will affect every part of the working of the Prison Service and its culture. In those circumstances, although these issues are operational matters for the Prison Service, it has to consider them as it looks for the appropriate way to run in the years ahead.

Mr B McCrea: I think that that is a debate for another day, but I am not sure that you can say that the symbols are an operational matter. How do they affect operations? They are a symbolic and strategic matter, so I put on record that I think that you need to think again about that.

Mr Ford: I am not aware of Ministers having chosen uniforms, for example, in the past. However, it is an issue that, as Basil McCrea said, I am likely to face further questioning on in this Assembly or elsewhere.

I repeat that I believe that this has been a useful debate and has given us an opportunity to highlight the crucial issue of the future of the Prison Service. I am grateful for the interest raised across the House, and I thank those Members who raised issues looking at the work that my Department, the South Eastern Trust and other Departments have to do to ensure that we implement the reforms that are so well highlighted in the report as necessary. That will give us the opportunity to transform NIPS into the organisation that we require for the future, which is one that makes society safer by reducing reoffending and, ultimately, offering enhanced protection and peace of mind for our families, friends and constituents and for the whole of this society.

Mr Eastwood: I begin by congratulating Mr Lynch and his colleagues for bringing forward this very important and timely motion. I agree with him that we need a new beginning for the Prison Service. We need root-and-branch change; incremental improvements are not enough. We need decisive leadership, and we have already had too many reports.

Unfortunately, Mr Givan suggests that our prisons are some sort of holiday camps. I ask him to confer with some people who are in Maghaberry now or have been there any time recently, because they might disagree with him.

Mr Maginness talked about the Owers report being a culmination of many other reports and said that we have had enough reports at this stage.

He said that the members of the Owers review team had a huge amount of experience and mentioned the urgent need for reform. He also said that the essence of the report is to ensure that there is a balanced approach to prisons; that we need a deterrent; and that we also need the opportunity for rehabilitation of those who are open to it. He stressed the urgency of the report's implementation and agreed with others that Hydebank should be completely reformed because it has had very little success in rehabilitating our young people.

6.30 pm

Mr McCrea said that we needed to convince the public of the merits of change. My clear argument is that the current system does not have public support, certainly not in my community. I was glad to hear Mr Dickson mention the need to have a balanced approach between punishment and rehabilitation. He highlighted the serious mental health issues in our prisons and the fact that suicide is a real concern. He also agreed that there was a need for urgency.

Mr Weir talked about the need for change and then proceeded to unpick the report as he went on. I argue that we have had enough reports and discussion and that it is now time for change.

I agreed with Jennifer McCann when she said that the DUP amendment was a delaying tactic. The fact is that time is of the essence. She is right to say that women's prisons and young offenders' centres are a huge issue in the report and that needs to be addressed. I agree that all the statistics, no matter how they are sliced, will tell you that, if you introduce young people and children to the judicial system very early on without the support that they require, they will only graduate through that system and end up in places such as Magilligan and Maghaberry.

I am glad to hear that Mr Anderson is not opposed to change. I agree that the reform of the prison system is on a par with the reform of policing in this part of the world. Thankfully, we got that right. What we now have, Mr Anderson, is people from my community risking their life every day to serve the people of the North of Ireland. I, for one, think that is a very positive step forward. It might be useful if you could recognise the risk that people are taking to do that.

Mr McCallister said nothing that I could agree or disagree with, because he said absolutely nothing. Mr McDevitt is right to say that the system is not fit for purpose and that the real change needs to be in people's mindset. It was interesting to hear Lord Morrow state that he does not care how many reports come out. He said that we just do not get it. In fact, he does not get it. The fact that anybody in the House could refuse to accept the findings of over 20 reports proves who does not get it, and on which side of the House they are.

I agreed with Mr Allister when he said that prison needs to be about punishment first, but, if we fail to rehabilitate young people and people going through the judicial and prison systems, the only people we really punish are the communities that they go back to and reoffend in. I am glad that Minister Ford supports the need for reform; in fact, he was emphatic about that. I request that he works towards that more urgently, but I accept his bona fides. In that regard, we will not push for a division on our amendment.

The bottom line is that the prisons —

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

Mr Eastwood: The prisons in this part of the world cultivate an environment that fails our society and does nothing to end the cycle of reoffending.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Wells: It is normal on these occasions to summarise the points made about one's amendment, but unfortunately, at the very end of Mr Ford's speech, he dropped a bit of a bombshell. I make it absolutely clear to him that this party will oppose totally and emphatically any attempt to change the name of Her Majesty's prisons, any attempt to drop the crown from the badge of the Northern Ireland Prison Service and any attempt to drop the phrase "Northern Ireland" from the Prison Service name. Those changes are totally unacceptable to the unionist community of Northern Ireland. If that is the route that he is going down, we promise him a long and difficult fight ahead. These are not issues —

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Member giving way. Does the Member agree that the flippant manner in which the Minister dealt with this issue only when interventions were made and his cavalier approach in throwing this out at the tail end of a speech will cause outrage in the community that we represent? Twenty-nine officers lost their life. You may go to Millisle and attend the remembrance service there, but you undid all of that today by raising an issue that Dame Anne Owers did not even mention in her report: you will attempt to strip the Prison Service of its title and badge. You do a disservice to the office that you hold. You need to think seriously about what you have said and take it off the table before you cause any further hurt to the people who have served and currently serve in the Prison Service.

Mr Wells: Needless to say —

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Member giving way. It is clearly an issue that is causing a degree of concern. I do not believe that I was flippant. Mr Allister raised the issue in the last contribution that was made before my speech. I responded to that in as honest a way as I could given the nature of the issue, the manner in which it has to be carried through and the responsibilities of the Prison Service. That is why the issue was raised by me in the way that it was; it was not intended to cause any offence.

When I attended a memorial service at Millisle last Friday, it was, as it was last year, to entirely genuinely recognise the sacrifice that I have

referred to and the service of those who have been in the Prison Service in different difficult times. Whether or not we are worried about that, how we recognise that does not alter the fact that the Prison Service is engaged in a process of fundamental end-to-end reform.

Mr Wells: The question that I have to ask the Minister is this: had it not come in the form of an interjection, would he have revealed to anyone in the Chamber that he is going to make such a fundamental change to the symbolism of the Northern Ireland Prison Service? It came out as an aside. That is absolutely no way to treat the House or to treat the brave members of the Prison Service, of whom 29 laid down their life, hundreds have been injured and many have had to move home. They did not do all that so that the crown could be dropped from the Prison Service badge and its name changed at the behest of the nationalist community. These are brave people, and the Prison Service's name and tradition have to be recognised. The point that I would make is that nobody raised this as an issue. Until today, no one raised the issue of the symbolism of the name of the Prison Service. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. I remind Members that remarks must be made through the Chair. We want to run a very tight regime in here. Continue.

Mr Wells: I make the point that nobody has raised these issues. There has been no indication that there is any problem with recruitment to the Prison Service because of the symbolism. Therefore, suddenly bringing this like a rabbit out of a hat at 6.40 pm, at the end of this debate, is disgraceful. I would like to ask the Minister, for whom I have a lot of respect, whether he can give us a guarantee that there will be no such change unless it is approved by the Executive and by a cross-community vote in the House. That is how fundamental these changes are. I am giving him the opportunity to give us an assurance that there will be no attempt to push this through as an administrative or operational decision and that it will be the subject of debate in the House, so that we Members, who represent the people of Northern Ireland, will have an opportunity to vote on that. I am waiting for his view on that.

Mr Ford: It appears that the Member is giving way, Mr Deputy Speaker. Operational decisions will be taken by the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Ministerial decisions will be taken by me. Cross-cutting decisions will be taken by the Executive.

Mr Wells: Well, then the question I have to ask the Minister is this: is this a cross-cutting decision? I believe it is. It is also a controversial decision that can be put before the Executive or the Assembly. There is absolutely no way that this is going to be slipped through as an administrative or operational decision, without the people of Northern Ireland having an opportunity to have their say on it. If this goes ahead, it will be deeply hurtful to the people of Northern Ireland. It is unnecessary, it is unwarranted, it is an expense and it will not change by one iota how any individual prisoner will be treated in prison.

I had, Mr Deputy Speaker, settled myself down to a rather boring and mundane résumé of what was said. However, quite clearly, the difference is that we have those who have been inmates of the Prison Service, who have considerable experience and, therefore, a jaundiced view of what the Prison Service provides, and those on this side of the House who pay tribute to the Prison Service for what it has done for this community under terribly difficult conditions.

We have also a difference of view with the SDLP, which does not trust the people of Northern Ireland and does not want them to be consulted about those far-reaching decisions. If we were convinced that there was a need for consultation before Mr Ford's statement, we are absolutely certain that there has to be consultation now, given the import of what he has just said —

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

Mr Wells: Therefore, this cannot be allowed to go through without the public having a view —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Wells: — and the public's view is that we reject these changes.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i dtacaíocht an mholta seo agus in éadan an leasaithe. Ba mhaith liom mo chuid buíochais a thabhairt do gach aon duine a labhair sa díospóireacht inniu.

I will speak for the motion and against the DUP amendment. I accept the spirit of the SDLP amendment and its decision not to divide the House.

I want to put the Anne Owers report into context. During debates in the Assembly, people sometimes forget where things originated. The report came out of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, where it was decided that there would be a review of prisons. Again — I have said this many times in the House — I heard no dissenting voices; I did not hear anyone say that there should not be a review of prisons, so I accept that everybody accepted that.

I listened intently to the debate on amendment No 1 and the reasons why there should be public consultation. During one Committee meeting, Alban Maginness referred to treading in treacle, and Anne Owers said that that was one of the observations that she made about the decision-making and reports in the past. She said that there was the ability for people to turn it into a treading treacle operation.

When the Anne Owers team came to give its first presentation on the interim report to the Committee, I did not hear any member say that it should go out for public consultation. We are seeing a retrospective argument today. People do not want to face the reality that there should be a fundamental review. This is a comprehensive insight, and I do not think that anybody denies that it is. I even heard people questioning Anne Owers's team today. Again, I did not hear any objections to any members of the team. As a result of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, there was agreement to have a review of youth justice provision. People felt that there was a conflict of interest with one of the members of that team. Those observations were made, and that person was not removed from the team but asked to step down and become part of the secretariat. Therefore, if anybody had any objections about the people on the team, there was room for change. There were no objections. I do not think that we can now question the validity or the integrity of the people involved.

Importantly, the report points us in the direction of where progress can be made. I have heard debates in the Assembly about the Criminal Justice Inspection report on prisons, and most people accepted that there was a need for those recommendations to be implemented. Anne Owers and her team said clearly that this was not an investigation and that it was not some sort of inspection. Instead, it provides us with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring our prisons into the 21st century, and most people accept that that is what we should do. We should have a prison service that is fit for the 21st century, and this gives us the opportunity to have that.

People have talked about why we tabled today's motion. Mr Anderson questioned the validity of Seán Lynch, Jennifer McCann and me, as former political prisoners, tabling the motion, and he is entitled to do that. About two minutes later, he went on to quote Napoleon Bonaparte as a person whose opinion would stand you in good stead. My recollection is that Napoleon Bonaparte was also a prisoner, and I would even call him a political prisoner. It might be a good idea for him to quote me, Seán and Jennifer more, instead of Napoleon Bonaparte.

6.45 pm

In her interim report, Anne Owers predicted what would happen, and we have seen it today in small measure. She predicted that there could be a culture of denial and that there could be a situation in which people would not sit down, look at the report in its broadest terms and ensure that it is taken forward in the spirit in which it was presented. She came to our Committee on a number of occasions, and I think we had a fairly reasonable, straightforward debate. It is only now that we are starting to see what I would contend are excuses to try to halt the progress.

The DUP amendment calls on the Minister to:

> *"work with the Executive to agree a way forward."*

Not one of the DUP's Members gave any reason today why that should be the case. I thought that an explanation of the role that the Executive should have in taking the report forward would form a very important part of their argument, but we did not get that. In many ways, most of the Members who spoke from the DUP Benches did not go into the report. They had their own pet subjects, which ranged from whether people in prison should get PlayStations to what colour of uniform prison staff should wear. If that is the level of debate as we take this forward, God help us.

What became clear throughout the report and from the presentations by Anne Owers's team

was the need for change. The need for change is overwhelming and accepted. Now, we will see the challenge, and that challenge faces the Minister, the Department and the senior management of the prison administration. That is why our motion states clearly that we want to ensure that the recommendations are implemented. People will accept that we are not expecting all the recommendations to be implemented in full next week, next year or in the next 10 years, but there is a process that has to ensure that the heart of the recommendations is implemented.

People want to make comparisons with Patten and the reform of policing. I am not going to do that today. I am not going to list all the faults that are in our prison system; they are there, and they are itemised. I will make one comparison with Patten however. It is important for the Minister and his senior team to understand that, whatever the success of Patten, it was a fact that there was an implementation plan and clear oversight mechanisms. Therefore, whatever progress was going to be made, we were going to see it. It is the same with the Prison Service; it has to be transparent and out in the open. That is why I welcome the Minister's acknowledgement today that he will chair an oversight committee.

Anne Owers's interim report had five headline recommendations, one of which was key: implementation and oversight. From my perspective, two of her most important recommendations were recommendations 22 and 23. I am not saying that the other recommendations relate to operational matters, but they do relate to how our Prison Service will operate. There are issues around the use of the prison estate, the siting of prisons, the type of people who should be in prison and where prisoners should be housed. There are also issues around training, recruitment and exit packages. Crucial to that — I want to make this point in conclusion — is a sense that the people who want this to become like treading in treacle and who want to remain in the culture of denial and of burying their head in the sand, rather than confronting the issues that face us, will be given protection and a place to hide if there is not proper oversight and an implementation plan.

Sinn Féin will judge the report, the work of the SEE programme and the work of the Prison Service and the Department on those outcomes. We want openness and transparency, an implementation plan and good oversight, so that after six months, 12 months, two years, three years, four years and five years we can sit back and say, "Here is what we agreed to do, and here is where we are". Therefore, if things run awry every now and again, as they can — it is part of the human condition — there is, at least, an explanation. However, we will not allow the report to join the list of reports that have been put on the shelf and allowed to run into the sand by people who were part of a culture of denial or of not wanting to tackle the issues.

Today, we will stand in opposition to the DUP amendment. We welcome very much the fact that the SDLP will not divide the House. We agree with the tone of the SDLP's amendment, as it calls for, if you like, a good implementation of the report that is well projected and well signposted. Our motion argues clearly that the report is a comprehensive piece of work and should be acknowledged as such. The report was asked for, it was delivered through the Hillsborough agreement, and, as I said in my opening remarks, no one spoke in opposition to the need for a prison review. That is why we tabled and will support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that, if this amendment is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2, as the wording of the original motion will have changed to such an extent that it would not be in order for the House to vote on amendment No 2.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 39; Noes 45

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Mr McQuillan.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Mr McMullan.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 45; Noes 39.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Mr McMullan.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr S Anderson and Mr McQuillan.

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly welcomes the final report of the prison review team; and calls on the Minister of Justice to initiate a plan to ensure that the report's recommendations are implemented and that progress is monitored; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that the appropriate scrutiny and accountability mechanisms are in place.*

Adjourned at 7.14 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 15 November 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Private Members' Business

Universities: Students' Community Background

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The first item on the Order Paper is the motion on disparity in community background of students attending university. As two amendments have been selected, up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes.

Mr Campbell: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes with concern the disparity in the number of students from a Protestant background attending universities in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to explore why this is the case and to bring forward a strategy to address the issue.*

This motion was debated in the Assembly almost two years ago. Obviously, the matter concerns a number of Members. Hopefully, because of the statistics that have been supplied helpfully by the Research and Information Service in preparation for the debate, it will concern everyone. The various figures for all enrolments show that 2,500 students who are domiciled in Northern Ireland attend universities in Liverpool alone. Nearly 1,500 attend universities in the Glasgow region. Of course, there are multiplicities attending other universities in Dundee, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, and throughout Wales and north-east England. However, when 4,000 students attend universities in those two main conurbations in England and Scotland, we see the scale of the number of students leaving Northern Ireland.

Some people ask whether that is necessarily a bad thing. It is not if most or all of those students return. I notice that during the previous debate, before Dr Farry became Minister, he intervened during a speech by my colleague the honourable Member for North Down Mr Easton to say:

> *"Will the Member clarify why, as a self-proclaimed unionist, he views a person from Northern Ireland who wishes to study in another part of the United Kingdom as any more of a problem than someone from London who wishes to study in Newcastle?" — [Official Report, Bound Volume 47, p229, col 1].*

When I read that quote, I not only thought that it was innocuous but wondered what on earth would have provoked such an intervention because however many hundreds or thousands of people leave London to study in Newcastle, they will not leave a knowledge gap or a skills gap or create a huge problem in London. However, that is not the case in Northern Ireland.

I would have thought that the obvious difference is that if many thousands of our best brains leave Northern Ireland to study at universities in GB, many will not return, and that will leave a huge gap in the Northern Ireland job market. I hope that the Minister, who I am glad to see in his place and who will respond, will have had almost two years to reflect on that intervention. Sometimes, on mature reflection, we can all see the wisdom of possibly changing our attitudes.

Just before that time, a report was prepared by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) that gives us quite significant insight into some of the issues. Although some of those issues have changed over time, some remain relevant and pertinent to 2011. For example, when students were questioned about information that they could receive about finance in the place where they would take their higher education courses, 70% of Catholics were likely to have received information about funding arrangements but only 55% of Protestants were

likely to have received that same information. So there is obviously an information gap. It will become less relevant in years to come, but that issue was flagged up some three years ago in the Department, and those who are preparing for their exams need the most information communicated to them in order that they can take an informed decision on the best place for them to proceed with their studies.

As a result of the debate, there will hopefully be much closer liaison between the Department of Education and Dr Farry's Department, the Department for Employment and Learning, because it is fairly clear that in the preparation period, whether it involves knowledge about finance, information about the courses that students are likely to want to undertake, or possible chill factors in Northern Ireland universities, which I will return to in a few moments, all that work needs to be done before a student takes the decision to study in GB.

For example, I have had reports in the past — thankfully, they are less prevalent now — of problems in freshers' weeks in Northern Ireland universities. For example, a situation with army cadet stands in Magee was reported to me, and, of course, once people get an impression that there is a cold house for a particular outlook, and once that spreads amongst 17- and 18-year-olds, others may well take the decision that that may not be the place for them, particularly if they or their family are in the cadets. Fortunately, that has dissipated to some degree.

The figures are stark, and a series of questions has been tabled regarding the numbers that lie at the root of this debate and the previous one. There have been improvements in some quarters, and I mentioned Magee College: six or seven years ago, an abysmal 10% of its students were Protestant. That was absolutely appalling; there was no justification for it. When you take the travel-to-work area, not just the Londonderry area but a 15-to-20 mile radius around the college, you would expect it to be about 30%, so it was one third of what it should have been. Some good work has been done, and the figure is now about 15%. That is an improvement, but it is still half of what it should be.

That is not to be ultra-critical. I want to be supportive, and I have made that very clear to senior people in Magee College. This is not exclusive to Magee. We see in the campuses of the University of Ulster and at Queen's University that there is under-representation of Protestants in the numbers of students applying.

Mr Allister: Does the Member agree that one of the most alarming and inexplicable situations pertains in the Jordanstown campus, where there is a gross disparity vis-à-vis the population catchment area, accentuated, strangely, by the success of the University of Ulster, and particularly Jordanstown, in attracting students from the Irish Republic? The Jordanstown campus seems, for some reason, to be more successful in attracting students from the Irish Republic than it is, proportionately, in attracting students from the controlled sector. Does the Member agree that that is one of the issues that the Minister needs to get to the bottom of?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I do. The figures for Jordanstown are stark, which returns us to whether there is a perceived cold house, a perception of particular activities that, for example, manifest themselves at freshers' week that percolate down to other 17- and 19-year-olds who have not yet committed themselves to that particular campus and who may decide that if that is the kind of place that it is, they will take their higher education elsewhere. Those factors have to be examined. Given the catchment area at Jordanstown, you would expect the proportion to be significantly higher, as you would at some of the other campuses.

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

Mr Campbell: In closing, I turn to what needs to be done. There must be closer liaison between Departments, an in-depth study on the report of three years ago commissioned by DEL, which indicated some of those problems, and the possibility of examining bursaries that could assist particularly under-represented groups.

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "notes" and insert

> *"the current background of students attending universities in Northern Ireland; calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to take all appropriate measures to ensure that this balance reflects the relevant cohort of the population; and further calls on the Minister to work with the Minister of Education to address barriers to students accessing higher education."*

I welcome the debate. If the Assembly is to be regarded as meaningful by local people — there seems to be some doubt about that at the

moment — it has to deliver for them. I cannot imagine that too many Members will disagree that there can be few more meaningful issues on which we need to deliver, as an Assembly, than provision of a world-class and inclusive system of education in Northern Ireland. Providing all local people with a first-class education and relevant skills is vital for their individual health and well-being. It is also vital for the social and economic well-being of this region, to the delivery of the Programme for Government and to building a shared and better future for all.

I hope that the entire House will give fair consideration and support to the amendment that I propose. I agree that a strategic approach to higher education is vital to providing a pool of the relevant skills necessary for economic recovery and personal development. However, any serious approach to widening participation in our universities must be joined up with the Department of Education and an Executive approach to improving educational aspiration and attainment and tackling child poverty amongst our children and young people. I hope that that is a position that the entire House can support in order to demonstrate to the public that we are willing and capable of working together to improve the lives of the people who put us here.

10.45 am

Of course, policy and legislation produced by the Assembly should be evidence based, and it is essential that we consider the figures and research available to us. However, they can be interpreted and presented in different ways. Although the Department for Employment and Learning must, of course, have a strategic approach to widening participation in higher education and require our higher education institutions to produce implementation plans on the delivery of that aim, perhaps the most fundamental issue that the Assembly and the Executive must tackle is a persistent lack of education aspiration and attainment, wherever it exists. To achieve that will require not only the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Education but the entire Executive to work together. I believe, therefore, that we have to increase the scope of the motion in order to more accurately examine the nature of the problem and how we respond.

I urge caution in regarding identity as a fixed issue, but if we look at figures for school-leavers who gained a place at university in 2009-2010, we see a breakdown of 53% from a perceived Catholic background, 38% from a perceived Protestant background and 9% undeclared. That is, in fact, broadly representative of the perceived background of the relevant age group in our community. However, research also suggests that 58·4% of females have two A levels at grades A to E when they leave school, compared with 42·8% of males. In relation to those from a low socio-economic background, the 55·2% of pupils who do not qualify for free school meals will leave school with two or more A levels, compared with 25·4% of those who do qualify. In addition, 88·5% of grammar-school pupils leave with two or more A levels, compared with 26·9% of secondary-school leavers. They will find access to university particularly difficult due to that relative underachievement and lack of qualifications.

The factors that contribute to that underachievement are complex. However, they may include poverty, a lack of value of education, deindustrialisation, a lack of parental participation, a lack of readiness for schooling, and in-school factors. What is clear, however, is that if we are serious about tackling the fundamental issue of underachievement and under-representation of that group at university and in general, it will require the Minister for Employment, the Minister of Education and the Executive to work together with a shared commitment to delivering different outcomes and equality of opportunity for all our children and young people.

That will have to include Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) delivery of a robust child poverty action plan and an effective early years strategy from the Department of Education. It will also require Executive leadership to tackle the post-primary transfer chaos and a compromise solution of transfer at the age of 14 to be given immediate and serious consideration. Progress on that issue is essential not only for the individual but for the entire economy and for building a shared and better future for all in Northern Ireland. I urge the House to support the amendment.

Mr P Ramsey: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out: "with concern".

I welcome the motion from my colleague in East Derry Gregory Campbell. I also welcome the opportunity to discuss this most important and crucial issue. It has wide-ranging implications

for confidence in parity within our third-level sector, and it gives the House an opportunity to understand the issue in more detail and to act to address the issues that Members, as Chris Lyttle said, feel might add to the perceived disparity in the number of students from a Protestant background attending our local universities.

That is something that I have been personally involved with in my constituency for a number of years. I acknowledge, even at this late stage — as Gregory has done — the contribution of Jim Allen, the former provost of Magee, who passed away recently. He made a significant contribution in attempts to ensure that the controlled sectors are well informed of the places available at Magee. Recently, I met a number of young Protestants who are studying at Magee to determine their perceptions of studying there. They had no resistance or reservations and they were happy to study at Magee.

In the course of researching this subject, I contacted the three Liverpool universities — Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool Hope University and the University of Liverpool — to determine the range of backgrounds of their students. I do not have that information but I will share it with Members and the Committee when I receive it.

I have total confidence in the work that our local universities are doing to ensure that those who are most able to go to university can attend on the merit of their educational attainment and not their religious or community background. That has been further enforced by the extensive information that I have received from them on this issue. The statistical data presented by Queen's University and the University of Ulster on students from each background from 2006 to 2009-2010 shows that there is no great disparity between one community and the other. Indeed, there are ebbs and flows both ways.

I was interested to note, however, that a pattern emerged from the Coleraine and Jordanstown campuses of the University of Ulster, where the number of students from both backgrounds steadily increased from 2005-06 to 2008-09. Both groups increased their numbers in 2008-09 again. I enquired at length about that in particular with the University of Ulster, but found no evidence to suggest that it had any strategy or plan in place to drive numbers up in that period; those students were simply in the system. Indeed, there was a rise in uptake throughout the University of Ulster of 600 students in 2008-09, which could explain the increase.

Mr Allister: I hear what the Member is saying, but has he not looked at the statistics that show that, particularly at the Jordanstown campus, there has been a distinct fall in the number of Protestant students attending between 2005 and 2009-2010, from 4,670 to 3,850? Likewise at Coleraine, the numbers have fallen from 2,200 to just over 2,000.

Mr P Ramsey: I accept totally what the Member is saying. At the Committee, I have raised the issue of what we can do. We could get an action plan as a result of this debate. The Committee has a duty to scrutinise and, as Chris Lyttle said, to get an evidence base so that we can go forward to make sure that that disparity, which the Member outlined, does not occur in the future. We all have a job at hand to ensure that we do that. It is not just for the Minister for Employment and Learning; it is for the Department of Education and OFMDFM going forward.

The University of Ulster in particular pointed out to me that there has been an increase in students who are deemed "other" or "no religion" when they are enrolled, from 2% of all students in 2006 to 9% in 2010. If that steady increase continues, which, I believe, we can expect, the disparity will grow even further, according to the university. The University of Ulster in particular is at pains to underline that it is committed to the equality of opportunity to which I referred earlier. The university conducted an equality impact assessment (EQIA) on its student recruitment and admissions policy in 2005-06.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not disagree with some of what the Member is saying. He is outlining some of the rationale for the changing numbers. However, if there were a significant under-representation of students from the Catholic community in higher education, and the nationalist party, the SDLP, were to table a motion viewing that with concern, how would Pat Ramsey feel if a unionist party said that it would agree with the motion if the words "with concern" were dropped?

Mr P Ramsey: I am going to continue my presentation to the House and explain how I and the SDLP see the situation going forward.

The EQIA to which I referred concluded that patterns of migration show that Protestant students are twice as likely as Catholics to

leave to study outside Northern Ireland. We accept that. Since that EQIA, the university's new marketing strategy has identified which schools provide low numbers of student applicants and the schools that had no existing relationship with the University of Ulster. We have a job to encourage the controlled sector, the grammar sector and our secondary schools and to motivate those students. That tells me that the University of Ulster is making the effort, as Gregory Campbell said. It understands the difficulties and disparities. We all know about those; we are not trying to hide them. We know that Protestant students possibly feel a sense of alienation and do not go to Magee, but we have a challenge to try to overcome that.

We need a cross-departmental strategy to address the issue. The Equality Commission's report entitled 'Every Child an Equal Child: An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention' states very clearly — I make it very clear to the House that I understand this — that a Catholic student from a disadvantaged background has a one in five chance of going to university while a Protestant child has a one in 10 chance. We have to overcome that and change as we go forward to address that problem.

Arising from that, we, as a legislature, should look at the issue in the round. We need to tackle, through finance and resources, the disparity at grass-roots level in the post-primary education system, before university is even on the agenda. The report entitled 'Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class', which was undertaken last year by a working group that included Dawn Purvis, a former Member, showed that educational attainment issues begin at an early age due to wide-ranging issues in the Protestant community. We have to decide the way in which we should go forward. I agree entirely that there is a problem in Northern Ireland, particularly for young boys as they try to achieve third-level education.

Normally, I would fully concur with the Alliance Party amendment. I fully concur with the DUP sentiments, but we need to get to the bottom of the issue if we are to make a difference. I am glad that the Minister is here today. The Committee should look at the problem in much more detail. Perhaps an inquiry is needed. I would fully support such a call from the unionist section, because there needs to be a qualified evidence base going forward. Ultimately, we need to look at how we can change the situation.

Gregory Campbell referred to our young people who go to Glasgow or Liverpool in their tens of thousands. From now on, young people will try to obtain a place in Northern Ireland because of the student fees. An old sore of mine is the Magee campus. Strong efforts are being made to try to ensure that young Protestants go to it. The maximum student number (MaSN) cap needs to be relaxed. If that happens, we will be absolutely certain that young Protestants will attend.

The SDLP understands the complexities of the problems. We want to ensure that —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr P Ramsey: — that disparity is addressed in future.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Sinn Fein does not support the motion because, effectively, it sectarianises the public debate about our universities.

The information pack that the Research and Information Service helpfully provided to all the parties ahead of this debate contains a number of quotes from spokespersons from the University of Ulster. One states that it is a sad reflection of society here that the religious composition of the North's student population should be a matter for public comment. It is also stated that the university engages in outreach work across the cultural and education spectrum to encourage students from all backgrounds to study on its campuses. Other similar quotes are dotted throughout that information pack.

11.00 am

In January 2010, Reg Empey, former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and the then Minister for Employment and Learning, rejected any notion that there were any strong chill factors that alienated either of the two main traditions from Queen's University and the University of Ulster. He continued:

> *"We are all aware of the importance of encouraging equal access to higher education, irrespective of a person's background, and my Department has put measures in place to widen participation. Without doubt, this is a complex issue whose roots*

reach back into primary and post primary level education."

Perhaps the DUP education voices should focus on the primary and post-primary experience of Protestant children in many educationally disadvantaged areas.

The evidence and the report undertaken by Osborne, Smith and Gallagher show that where students choose to study is complex and nuanced. For example, 81% consider choosing the best place for the preferred course to be important. It is not impossible to offer every course at the two local universities or the Open University. Other factors that influence decisions include the following questions: "Can I keep my part-time job?"; "Will I have a good social life?"; and "Will my friends go there?". It is well established that many students choose — they are not forced — to go to universities in England and Wales for a wider educational experience.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: I will not give way.

Jim Allister and Gregory Campbell have collaborated well in this debate. They regularly table questions seeking to focus attention on the religious breakdown of students at individual universities and campuses or of those who have applied for places; no great surprise there. However, rather than being concentrated on the religious background of students attending local universities, perhaps their energies would be better spent trying to ensure that the opportunity to attend university is there for anyone who wishes to attend. Their attention should focus on the quality of education provided to students who secure admission. They should be concerned about keeping costs for students attending university to a minimum. The Executive deserve commendation for capping student fees in the way that they have.

Effectively, this persistent line of questioning and the tabling of this motion could mislead the public. It could create the wrong impression that Queen's University and the University of Ulster are cold houses for Protestants. That would ignore the evidence. It is not the case, and it is not true. If the motion were to be passed, it would send a disturbing message to those who run our local universities, the students who attend and the wider public.

My main point is that there is no qualitative or quantitative evidence to support the motion. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. In June 2008, DEL published research that stated that universities in the North were welcoming to all groups in respect of religion, disability, ethnicity and socio-economic status. We could very well be sending departmental officials on a wild goose chase for explanations for circumstances that do not exist.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion today, but I urge those who tabled it to look beyond simple numbers on a sheet. The issue is much more complex than that.

There is most definitely a serious problem attracting young people from the Protestant faith to our local universities. Having attended the University of Ulster at Magee College in Londonderry, where only one fifth of students came from a Protestant background, I believe passionately, as does my party, that religion should not be a factor in deciding where to attend university. I accept that those attending Magee College may feel happy while they are there, but I am concerned about why so many choose not to attend there. Unfortunately, that is the case, and it is an issue that most definitely needs additional attention to rectify. Therefore, I support Mr Campbell's call for the Department for Employment and Learning to explore the reasons behind the disparity in the community backgrounds of Northern Ireland students.

I believe that the imbalanced make-up of our universities reveals a problem that is deeper than just many people from one faith going across the water and many from another staying in Northern Ireland. I believe strongly that the underachievement of working-class Protestant young people, combined with an apparent fear factor about heading to university here, adds to the problem that we are discussing.

In January 2010, the DUP brought a similar motion before the House. It is sadly typical of the Assembly and the Executive that, more than 18 months on, we are debating the same issue. Indeed, the Member who tabled that motion called for a robust action plan. Today's motion, which is in a similar vein, could be seen as nothing more than a PR exercise. If the DUP were serious about the issue, why has it not yet sought to address it from the Executive? I would be interested —

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Overend: I would like to finish this paragraph. What specific actions has the DUP taken? If it has not done anything, the fact that it has tabled a second motion on the matter shows that it is only willing to pay lip service to the issue.

Mr Ross: Will the Member remind us who the Employment and Learning Minister was in the previous mandate when the motion was tabled?

Mrs Overend: In 2009, that Minister said:

> *"I am determined that students should have total freedom of choice when deciding where to study, but I am also focused on addressing issues of under-representation wherever they occur, irrespective of religion, so that none of our young people are held back from realizing their full potential."*

The problem of working-class underachievement in the Protestant community was highlighted by Dawn Purvis during her time in the House, and, in her report, Dr Peter Shirlow of Queen's University stated:

> *"Disadvantaged Catholics are twice as likely to attend university as Protestants... Many working class Protestants were heavily involved in manufacturing industry and viewed getting a trade as the main educational requirement. With the collapse of the labour market this has changed."*

That statement highlights the challenge that we face. We must encourage as many Protestants as possible to study at our universities and, indeed, colleges throughout Northern Ireland. However, if we are to be effective in achieving our long-term economic goals, we must guide and help the underachieving areas that were previously reliant on the old industries into the new areas of the economy.

The Assembly has failed to get to grips with the current economic crisis and to make opportunities out of it. Six months after the House returned, we are still waiting for the Programme for Government, which we are told will be released next week. The lack of vision, focus and direction from the two largest parties in the Assembly is damaging to tackling such problems as the one that the motion raises. We must highlight and promote the STEM subjects for our long-term economic future. Universities and colleges have to take the lead on that. A number of subjects offered in our universities are not suited to providing or able to provide the graduate employment that is deserved or desired. If we want to attract the high-end jobs that will attract Protestant youth, universities must offer the right skill sets. The previous Ulster Unionist Ministers for Employment and Learning did some excellent work in that area, promoting university and further education to all and highlighting and promoting STEM subjects.

In summary, there has to be action in working-class Protestant areas to promote not only university but other areas of educational achievement. University is not the only route open to students. That having been said, the statistics around the disparity between Protestants and Roman Catholics are a bad report for local universities. The motion misses the whole picture. It addresses the need to attract more Protestants, particularly those from working-class areas, into higher education. There is a need for action, and, in this case, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. Many underlying issues need to be addressed before we can correct fully that terrible disparity. Therefore, I encourage and support the motion in the hope that some action will come from it.

Mr Buchanan: I support the motion, as it is now time for the Minister and his Department to do more than pay lip service to the concerns that the motion raises and to put into action a strategy to address the issue and reverse the imbalance. Almost two years ago, a similar motion called on the then Minister, Sir Reg Empey, to introduce measures to ensure that more students from a Protestant background were encouraged to opt for universities in Northern Ireland as their first choice. I see little evidence, if any, that that Minister put in place such measures. Today, universities in Northern Ireland attract only 40% of Protestant students, an imbalance and disparity that can no longer be ignored.

Mr McElduff talked about examining the evidence. Let us examine it and weigh it up. The fact is that two thirds of the 35,000 students attending our two universities in Northern Ireland are from a Roman Catholic background. Surely that highlights a serious chill factor for Protestant students, and, no matter how we may try to dress it up with fine words or fair speeches, there is still a gross religious imbalance that our universities must take in hand and address.

The startling figures for the University of Ulster campuses at Jordanstown and Magee — one third of students at Jordanstown and only one fifth at Magee are from a Protestant

background — raise the question about the sort of recruitment drive used by the University of Ulster to attract those from our controlled schools. I hope that it will now take its recruitment drive much more seriously.

What is it that drives our students away? What makes them more willing to study outside Northern Ireland rather than stay here? Is it really all down to student choice, or could it be because of an imbalance in teaching in our universities? For example, a series of history lectures at one of our universities was based solely on a nationalist perspective and completely failed to reflect the unionist background. Does that not play a part in making our universities cold houses for unionism and help to create the disparity witnessed in recent times? We have a diverse culture, which our universities must recognise and address, if they are determined to deliver equality of choice for our students.

Another factor that the Minister must examine is the availability of information on funding for our students. Recent figures reveal that 74·2% of those in Catholic grammar schools received information on the availability of funding, compared with only 58·9% in Protestant grammar schools. In Catholic secondary schools, 57·1% received such information, compared with 24·4% in Protestant secondary schools. Given those figures, is it any wonder that we are having this debate again on the disparity between the numbers of Protestant and Catholic students attending our universities?

Other issues, such as the type and length of course and a closer working relationship between our universities and colleges and our post-primary schools need to be factored into a strategy. I urge the Minister to look into those matters and give them his urgent attention. We do not want to be back here in another two years having the same debate with no action having been taken in the meantime. We want to see the disparity brought to an end and consigned to the dustbin of history for ever. We want to see a level playing field for all our students across our universities in Northern Ireland.

11.15 am

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have listened to some rubbish in the House in my day, but this morning probably comes close to beating it all. I have just listened to Tom Buchanan say that there is no evidence that the Department for Employment and Learning has taken steps to counteract this so-called disparity. However, no matter where we look today, there is no evidence of that disparity or of a cold house for Catholics or a chill factor for Protestants entering the University of Ulster or Queen's University.

The reality is that there are many complex and diverse reasons behind students going to the university of their choice. A number of members of my own family decided to study across the water. My sister has a distinction from Oxford University and another sister went to Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh. They went there because of the course that they wanted to do, as well as for a different university experience across the water. That choice is available to any student who reaches third-level education.

The Members who tabled the motion need to understand that there are other factors behind the fact that young people from a unionist background may not feel like going into third-level education. One such factor, which I have mentioned a number of times in the Employment and Learning Committee, is early educational disadvantage and the difficulty that some of our communities have preparing their children for primary 1 and primary 2. John Simpson, the economist, said in a meeting in this Building, which, from memory, Gregory Campbell may have attended, that there are children aged five and six within a five-mile radius of here who are no longer suitable for an educational environment. That is an awful indictment of our society, but, unless we provide support at early years, we will not get the results that we need to see.

We need to address some of the reasons why people underachieve at school. Much more needs to be done, and I have been pressing the Health Minister to do more to ensure that programmes such as Home-Start and Sure Start are funded so that we can continue to give parents support to enable their children to go on to benefit from their school experience, both primary and post-primary, thus equipping them to proceed to third-level education.

We also have to look at the demographics. At the moment, there are 43,000 more Catholic pupils in our schools, from nursery to sixth form, than there are Protestants. Dr Peter Shirlow, an academic from Queen's University, said that

the percentage of Catholics and Protestants attending our universities reflected:

"the share of what the population is."

We have to look at how many children are coming through our schools and likely to want to go into third-level education.

The figures that have been quoted today by Members such as Jim Allister are a bit misleading. We have an excellent third-level college in the form of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, which contains many young people from all different backgrounds. If the student figures from that college were to be incorporated into the statistics that have been thrown out today, Members would see a much more balanced picture.

Of course, some Members speaking in the debate do not want to be balanced or objective or to look at the problems facing our society, not just when it comes to Stephen Farry's area of responsibility but when it comes to the responsibility of the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Some Members here are indulging in a scaremongering exercise and causing unnecessary concern among those tasked with running and teaching in our higher-level institutions, among parents whose children attend those universities and among the student population.

I want to finish on a point that some Members who spoke in the debate need to take on board. I spoke last year to a number of people from the Royal School in Dungannon who were horrified at the attempts made by the DUP, UUP, TUV, Orange Order and Tories to drag us back to the past through their attempt to mobilise Protestants to vote against me in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone Westminster election.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms Gildernew: Young people were horrified that, in spite of so much progress, there were unionist politicians who still wanted, to use those young people's words, to drag us back to the past.

Mr Campbell: Wake up.

Ms Gildernew: No, the point is that you need to wake up and smell the coffee.

Mr Ross: I will return to the motion at hand.

First, I want to refer to the amendments that the Alliance Party and the SDLP tabled. Effectively, the two amendments remove the word "concern" from the motion, but at least those two parties have recognised that the student population in Northern Ireland is not reflective of broader society. They are fairly genuine in their recognition of the fact that we need to ensure that there are no barriers to any young people in Northern Ireland attending universities here.

The Sinn Féin spokesman, Mr McElduff, claimed that the motion is about sectarianising the debate on further and higher education. That argument may suit Sinn Féin today, but, on a range of other issues, if there were under-representation of one section of the community or society in any area in Northern Ireland, that party would be the first to jump up and down about it and claim that something must be done

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. I wonder whether the Member thinks it ironic that, on every occasion that there is under-representation of the Catholic community in any sector of society, for Sinn Féin the factors are black and white and systematic: "The Brits are to blame" or "It is 'cos we is Cafflics". Yet, when we discuss a matter such as this, they say it is very complex, very difficult to understand, very unusual and we have to get to grips with it. It is funny that, when it is the other way around, there does not seem to be any complexity; it is very clear, stark and black and white.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for his contribution. Consistency is not something that Sinn Féin is renowned for, and I do not think there is any difference with this issue. The reality is that, if we have a student population in Northern Ireland that is not broadly reflective of Northern Ireland society, clearly something is driving that situation. That is what the Assembly should be concerned about.

In proposing the motion, Mr Campbell laid out some statistics. He told the House that there were considerably fewer people from a Protestant background at universities in Northern Ireland than from a Roman Catholic background. Some of the starkest figures are at Magee College, where 20% of the student population between 2005 and 2010 was from

a Protestant background. Those figures cover a broad period. The fairly uneven figures at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, which is in my constituency, were also mentioned. There are over 6,500 Roman Catholics on campus compared with fewer than 4,000 Protestants. Not only are those figures not representative of the catchment area as such, they are not representative of the whole of Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is something that we need to look at.

I am glad that the Member from the Ulster Unionist Party recognised that this is an issue. She said that it was a disgrace that nothing had been done about the issue since the DUP tabled a similar motion two years ago, but perhaps she should have remembered that it was her Minister who did nothing about it then. Perhaps, a bit like her welcoming of the student fees announcement and the gradual wind down after that, this might be an issue on which she needs to reconsider what she said.

We need to look at three specific areas when dealing with this issue. First, entrance to university is based on grades; therefore, we need to look at whether there is a difference between the grades being achieved by young Protestants and young Catholics. The statistics for young people getting two or more A-level grades show a slight disparity of 56% versus 49%, so perhaps we need to look at that. However, that disparity is not wide enough to lead to the imbalance in our student population.

As Members have said, we recognise that there is a problem with underachievement in Protestant working-class communities, particularly among boys. That is well known. It is not something that this Minister has to deal with, but it is something that has to be addressed by the Education Minister and within communities. Parents and local representatives have key roles to play, not only in raising achievement but in raising aspirations, so that young people can feel that they too can go to university and further themselves by getting good qualifications and a good job. It is important that young people from every community and area in Northern Ireland put a value on having a good education in order to get a good job. I agree with the Member for East Belfast Chris Lyttle who highlighted the importance of early years education. That is a crucial point: much of the disadvantage in education begins at the earliest years.

Secondly, as Mr Campbell said, more unionists go to GB to study than Roman Catholics. I, too, went to Scotland to study at Dundee. I did so not because I felt that I could not go to university here but because I wanted to have a different experience and that level of freedom. I certainly enjoyed myself, but I always wanted to come back. The question is whether more unionists are going away to study and not coming back. That is why other areas of the Executive have to look at lowering corporation tax and creating more graduate jobs so that we get people back.

Another issue is the chill factor. Mr McElduff said that there is no such thing, but, frankly, I will not listen to his opinion on it, I will listen to the young people who tell me that they feel they would not be comfortable going to a particular campus because of a chill factor. They feel that they would not be welcome and that that campus would not be particularly friendly for them. If there are campuses where young unionists or young Protestants feel that they are not welcome and would be put under pressure because of their background, there is a problem.

The issue is a serious one and must be addressed. It is important that the Executive look at the three areas that I mentioned.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Ross: I support the motion.

Mr Douglas: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on the motion, which I support. This week, Bob Collins, chief commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, responded to statistics published last week. They clearly showed the disparity in the community backgrounds of Northern Ireland students who have enrolled in our local universities. He raised thorny issues that are integral to today's debate. He said:

> *"Imbalance in educational outcomes is a crucial issue, one that goes well beyond the composition of University student bodies. It has the capacity to deprive Northern Ireland of a great reserve of potential talent and skills."*

The Member for East Belfast Chris Lyttle highlighted that point, and my colleague Gregory Campbell mentioned the thousands of students who, perhaps for the reasons that another colleague talked about this morning, go across the water. We have to talk about those issues.

This is not a sectarian motion; it is a motion that asks why these things are happening. The issue extends from early years to when people apply to university. Bob Collins went on to say:

> *"It is welcome that it is receiving increasing attention from elected representatives."*

Those words were spoken by the head of the Equality Commission. He also said:

> *"It must engage the urgent concern and action of all who can influence these matters."*

That is the head of the Equality Commission saying that he has concerns. What is the main concern of Bob Collins and many in the Chamber? It has been highlighted before and today that only one in three of the 35,000 university students in Northern Ireland is from a Protestant background, as revealed recently. The motion demands an explanation; that is all we ask for. Let us dig deep and find out why. What are the reasons for the disparity?

If we drill down into the statistics, we will see another scary statistic. A socially disadvantaged pupil in a Catholic maintained school will have a one in five chance of going to university, as my colleague Pat Ramsey said this morning. We recognise the problem of educational underachievement in Catholic and nationalist areas. However, let me compare that situation with a similar pupil in a Protestant controlled school. That pupil has a one in 10 chance of getting anywhere near a university. Why does only one in 10 Protestant working-class males get an opportunity to attend a university? We all need to address that question, because it has a bearing on the future of our society and relates to a big percentage of this community. Only one third of university students are from the Protestant community. That figure is below what we would expect, so we need to look at that as well.

The debate is not about sectarianism; I would not be here if it was. Recently, a spokesman from the University of Ulster seemed to have implied that it was when the issue was raised. He said:

> *"It is a sad reflection of society here that the religious composition of our student population should be a matter for public comment."*

It is an even sadder reflection of society that, at the heart of those statistics on participation in education as a preparation for life, are individual young people, mainly young Protestant males, whose lives will be permanently influenced by the choices that they are able to make. Those facts have consequences for the individuals, their families and their communities. We all understand the importance of education as a passport for life and as a powerful influence on access and advancement in employment.

There is a great risk that those already disadvantaged will face further disadvantage as a result of increased competition for scarce jobs from those who have secured greater benefit from their education. I want to conclude with the words of Bob Collins:

> *"There has to be an appreciation of the real consequences for Northern Ireland of a growing number of people whose chances of realising their full potential are consistently diminished by educational disadvantage. Here is an opportunity to set aside partisan focus and, instead, genuinely to share the task of finding solutions."*

That is all we ask for here this morning. I agree with Bob Collins, and I support the motion.

11.30 am

Mr Allister: This is an important debate because it focuses on an issue that some people would rather not discuss, but the facts demand that we discuss it because they indisputably show that there is a disparity in higher education, which disadvantages Protestant students from the controlled sector. It is most marked in the University of Ulster, and if the Minister does anything out of this debate, I implore him to sit down with the leadership of that university to have a serious discussion about why its figures have got so out of kilter, particularly with regard to the Jordanstown campus, where, since 2005, there has been an 18% reduction in the intake of students from a Protestant background.

Given the location of the Jordanstown campus, that figure is quite startling. Yet, at the same time, that university has been remarkably successful in attracting students from the Irish Republic, particularly to its Jordanstown campus. There are 2,800 students from the Irish Republic at the University of Ulster; half of them are enrolled at the Jordanstown campus, yet that campus is struggling to attract Protestant students, and there is a falling Protestant enrolment. That is an issue that should alarm the Minister. It has to be

addressed, and I implore him to exhaustively explore that with the Ulster university.

One of the reasons might be found in research that was done for the Committee for Employment and Learning 18 months or two years ago, which found that 43% of university students from a Catholic background had had their school visited by a university, but only 20% of Protestants from the controlled sector had had their school visited by a university. Therefore, if the recruitment drive is misaligned and misfocused, it is no surprise that the follow through is what we have today. The universities need to address their recruitment efforts with regard to what is working through in the system.

We have had some interesting contributions in this House. The SDLP has tabled an amendment. That party apparently expressed itself with great sincerity in understanding, sympathising with and being regretful for the disparity, yet its amendment takes out the very manifestation of that concern by removing the word "concern". In terms of its credibility, the SDLP would do much for the stand that it has taken in this debate and the words that it uses if it were not to press its amendment, which contradicts so much of what Mr Ramsey had to say.

With regard to Sinn Féin, of course, as has been pointed out, it is unbelievable. This is the party that, at every drop of a hat, is up, shouting about perceived and manufactured discrimination if it dares to touch on the Catholic community, but when it is staring that party in the face in respect of the Protestant community, we have such sanctimonious phrases from Mr McElduff that it really is a sad reflection of society that we even discuss it. His sanctimonious approach is a demonstration in itself of his own sectarianism because although he is interested if there is disadvantage to Catholics, he rejoices if there is disadvantage to Protestants and tells us not to be so foolish and not to demean ourselves and that it is a sad reflection to even discuss it. However, whether Sinn Féin likes it or not, it has been, and will be, discussed.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Allister: As for the Alliance Party —

Mr McElduff: I thank Mr Allister — my colleague — for giving way. Can I point out that it was not just me who made the point that neither of the two local universities — Queen's University and the University of Ulster — has strong chill factors that alienate either tradition or community? Reg Empey, the former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, made that exact statement; it was not just me.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Allister: I carry no candle for Reg Empey. The facts speak for themselves.

The Alliance Party's amendment uses a lot of useful words and it seems to identify that there might be an issue that needs to be addressed. Sadly, however, it is contradicted by an answer that I hold in my hand from the Alliance Party's Minister who, in reply to a question for written answer on 20 October, said:

> *"In general, there is no underrepresentation of Protestants in higher education."*

If that is what the Minister thinks —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Allister: If that is what the Minister thinks, it calls into question something of the credibility of the Alliance Party's amendment. I trust that he will reflect on and retract from the position that hitherto he has taken.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the House for my late arrival, which was caused by circumstances beyond my control.

The issue does, at least, bear discussion. I heard Mr Douglas say that, and, on the face of it, there is a disparity between the number of Protestants and Catholics going to Northern Ireland institutions. So, it is right that we should have a look at the matter and talk out the issues. However, just because that is so, I am not necessarily led to the conclusion that Mr Allister reached, which is that there is cause and effect and some sort of a problem.

As a unionist, I think that it is good that students go to universities throughout the United Kingdom. Personally, I would like to see them go, and I would like to see them come back, because I think that it enriches their experience. I know that it may not be a popular thing for everybody here to consider, but that is exactly the route

that I took. My primary degree was at the University of Birmingham, not that it taught me a great deal, to be honest, but it was certainly a very interesting experience. Later on, having got work experience, you eventually come back. I came back to the University of Ulster. Therefore, I was one of the Protestants who went to the University of Ulster, and I have to say that I was very pleased with the education that I got there.

When I read DEL's report, I found that it told me certain things that I was not expecting. I thought that it would say that unionists/Protestants were happy enough to go to the United Kingdom and that Catholics/nationalists would prefer to stay here. However, that was not what it said. It said that they go across in equal numbers. From what I can see, the real problem is the continued under-representation of people coming from the controlled sector into higher and further education. That is why I am pleased that the matter has been raised. It seems that that continued under-representation has more to do with either a lack of aspiration for that type of employment or with parents who are not convinced that that is the way that they want their child to go. You have to tackle that issue, which is at the root of the statistics.

Of course, it is absolutely right that people should have a choice about where they go. However, they should also be aware that the choices that they make when they are young will have profound effects on their employability, their income stream and their contribution to society in the years to come. Therefore, there is an issue about getting out more and explaining to people in the controlled sector that getting a university degree or some further education is a really good route to take. There will be a significant skills gap for level 3 education in the years to come, and we have to tackle that.

However, I look at a number of other issues with some concern. Although it is not a general problem, one of the issues that stands out is the perception that Protestants are not welcome at St Mary's — they represent about 20% of students there, and that needs to be looked at. Conversely, the figures suggest that Catholics feel that they are not welcome at Stranmillis. That does not seem to be a healthy situation, and it must be addressed.

When I looked at the report in some detail, I was struck by the impact of costs and how that influences people. It seems that those students from, shall we say, better-off backgrounds in the Protestant community tend to go to local universities. I had not expected that. *[Interruption.]* I seem to have lost the attention of the House temporarily.

Ms S Ramsey: We have no interest in you. *[Laughter.]*

Mr B McCrea: Through you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I know that Ms Ramsey, as a previous Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning, will have looked at this issue and have been very interested in the outcomes.

The issue that comes out of the report, which forms a good basis for going forward, is that cost matters. People, particularly those from areas where they do not normally go to university, do not want to put themselves in debt, because they are unsure whether they will get an economic return. The report also points out that Protestants are significantly less well informed than their Catholic counterparts.

With all of that, I commend the proposers of the motion for tabling it. I have no doubt that the Committee will want to talk about it further —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time.

Mr B McCrea: The issue requires absolute inquiry rather than shooting from the hip.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion today, and I thank all the Members who have contributed to the debate. In Northern Ireland, we must seek to secure a sustainable and globally competitive economy. To achieve that, we must move from a position that relies on low costs to compete to one that is based on higher value-added products and services, innovation, creativity and, most importantly, high workforce skills. Therefore, I strongly recognise the importance of maximising participation in higher education and, moreover, of ensuring that that happens on an inclusive basis.

Turning to the specifics of the motion, I must be clear that there is no pervasive under-representation of Protestants in higher education. Based on the statistical information that is available, participation in higher education among the Protestant section of our community is broadly in line with Protestant representation in the school-leaving population of Northern Ireland and the relevant age cohort as recorded in the 2001 census. There is, however, evidence

of under-representation among some specific sections of our society, including young Protestant males, particularly those from inner-city areas.

Before I look at representation in greater detail, a word of caution is important about how we consider statistics. It is also important that we take care in how we put labels on people. It is very simplistic to assume that people's religious, national and political identities all reinforce each other, and that people can be neatly pigeonholed into the two communities that are often referred to. Rather, it is becoming increasingly clear that many people, particularly young people, have open, mixed and multiple identities. Northern Ireland is becoming a more diverse society: we are seeing that in the statistics, and it should be welcomed and cherished. More and more people are defining themselves as different to the traditional identities, with more people in, or the product of, mixed marriages and mixed relationships and more people coming to live here from elsewhere, including a growing ethnic minority population. All of that calls into question a fixation on a narrow Protestant versus Catholic analysis, particularly when we look at the figures.

That said, let us look at the figures; people seem determined to do it. In 2009-2010, over 9,600 Northern Ireland school leavers entered their first year in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, Ireland and elsewhere. Of those, 3,631 were Protestant, 5,137 were Catholic and 855 were of unknown or no stated religion. That translates into participation rates of 38% for Protestants, 53% for Catholics and 9% for others, which closely reflects the backgrounds of 39%, 54% and 7% that were recorded for the relevant age cohort in the 2001 census. Also, by comparison, the Department of Education's 2009-2010 school leavers survey indicated that the religious composition of the school leaver population was 40·5% Protestant, 50% Catholic and 9·5% other. It is also worth noting that around 1% of the total participation figure represents fewer than 100 students. Therefore, relatively small changes in student numbers each year can have a disproportionate effect on the perceived profile of participation.

Let us drill down further and look at the specific situation in Northern Ireland's universities. In 2009-2010, according to Higher Education Statistics Agency data, 38% of Northern Ireland-domiciled enrolments with known religion at Northern Ireland higher education institutions were Protestant, 56% were Catholic and 6% were other religions or none. That, again, is broadly representative. In 2009-2010, of the 2,764 students who chose to leave Northern Ireland to study in Great Britain, approximately 1,238 were Protestant, 1,146 were Catholic and the rest were other religions or none.

11.45 am

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for giving way. While he is drilling down through the figures, would he care to comment on his Department's report of June 2008 on the attitudes and perceptions of Northern Ireland school leavers towards higher and further education, which indicates possible chill factors that might discourage students from applying to a particular institution? The report states that although 63% said that they felt no chill factor, 33% did not answer the question at all. Does he think that that figure is quite high?

Dr Farry: Statistically, it may well be quite high, but one must take great care in making any assumptions when people do not declare an answer. I will comment in a moment on the specific research to which Mr Campbell referred.

In looking at the Great Britain figures, I make the point that we are in a situation where proportionately more Protestant students migrate than the population as a whole, and that fact is acknowledged in the context of overall lower Protestant participation rates in higher education. Another 1,165 Northern Ireland-domiciled students are enrolled in higher education courses in the Republic of Ireland. However, we have no breakdown of the religious composition of those people because it is not collected there.

Some people have drawn particular attention to the participation profiles in specific campuses of the University of Ulster. It is important to remind the House that the University of Ulster is Northern Ireland's only multi-campus university, with different courses offered on different campuses. No simplistic conclusions can or should be drawn from the student profile at any one campus. It is important to stress that the participation rates overall from the Protestant section of our community across all University of Ulster campuses are broadly in line with that section of the community's representation in the school-leaving population of Northern Ireland.

Moving to the issue of chill factors, it is important to stress that I firmly believe that the two local universities provide genuine shared space and practise genuine equal opportunities. A number of recent studies have challenged previously held perceptions that more Protestants than Catholics choose to study in Great Britain due to a perceived chill factor for Protestants in Northern Ireland's universities.

In June 2008, my Department published research by Professor Osborne et al, to which Mr Campbell referred, on participation in higher education by Northern Ireland students. The evidence presented in that report indicated that there were very few negative perceptions of local institutions among the then current generation of school leavers. In fact, most respondents reported that local institutions were very welcoming to students of all religions, disabilities, ethnicities and socio-economic status.

If we look specifically at the issue of religion, we can see that only 1·5% of respondents felt that QUB was not welcoming to the Catholic section of the community and that only 2·9% responded that it was not welcoming to the Protestant section. Only 1·6% of respondents felt that the University of Ulster was not welcoming to the Catholic section of the community, and only 2·6% responded that it was not welcoming to the Protestant section.

The same report indicated that, in the main, those who opt for a university place in Great Britain as their first choice do so because they believe that their chosen institution is the best place to study their preferred subject. Other reasons given included a preference to study at a particular university and the development opportunity of living and studying away from home. That mobility level is also related to relative affluence. Others opt to study elsewhere because particular courses are not available here or because they have insufficient grades to access courses locally.

In an increasingly global society, it is right that Northern Ireland students should continue to have the opportunity to participate in higher education elsewhere. It is also right that we continue to welcome students from outside Northern Ireland to study at our institutions. A degree of inward and outward migration is of value to Northern Ireland. External students bring new ideas and skills, and we have one of the best retention rates of such students after graduation.

However, excessive or permanent outward migration can, of course, have social and economic costs. Ideally, young people who go elsewhere to be educated and trained will return home, bringing with them their new-found skills to help to grow our economy. Nevertheless, that will happen only if we have quality jobs locally to entice potential returnees.

I will now look in more detail at widening participation. We must ensure that there is availability of opportunity in Northern Ireland for all who want to study at home and have the potential to benefit from higher education. Widening participation in higher education is one of my Department's key strategic goals and is certainly one of my personal goals. It will be a fundamental component of the forthcoming higher education strategy.

My vision for widening participation is that any qualified individuals in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to the higher education that is right for them, irrespective of their personal or social background. Indeed, Northern Ireland has one of the highest participation rates in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, there are still some stubborn pockets of under-representation, which is particularly acute among those from less affluent socio-economic groups and, in particular, young Protestant males in those socio-economic classifications.

Working-class Protestant males who were entitled to free school meals make up only 4% of new entrants each year, which is significantly less than their representation in the wider community. Therefore, the key to raising the uptake of university places from the Protestant working-class section of the community is to raise aspirations and attainment levels while young people are still in school. That is the broad thrust of the Alliance Party amendment, which most Members acknowledged, even though some of them stated different voting intentions. Although that is primarily a matter for the Department of Education and the schools sector, my Department provides special project funding that allows the universities to develop partnerships with non-selective schools in disadvantaged areas. Pupils from controlled post-primary schools in areas where there have been traditionally low levels of participation in higher education are specifically targeted for

inclusion in programmes such as Step-Up and Discovering Queen's.

The University of Ulster's Step-Up programme provides an opportunity for young people from disadvantaged areas in Belfast and Londonderry, many with low attainment levels and relatively low expectations, to improve their academic performance and to gain entry to universities. The programme is very well regarded, with a completion rate of 95%, and has helped over 1,000 people to access university courses.

The Discovering Queen's initiative also targets pupils in non-selective secondary schools who have experienced disadvantage. To date, some 20,000 pupils have engaged with the programme, and 87% have reported that the initiative has made them more likely to want to attend higher education.

In addition, my Department provides funding directly to the higher education institutions by way of a widening participation premium for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the academic year 2011-12, that amounts to £2·2 million. Higher education providers are also required to have access agreements in place, which include the provision of student bursaries and outreach activities. The philosophy behind access agreements is that the introduction of student fees should not have a detrimental effect on widening participation and that institutions are explicitly committed to increasing participation rates among under-represented groups. Those initiatives have had a degree of success and will undoubtedly help to address some of the underlying issues. However, as I outlined, I recognise that various groups are still under-represented, and we clearly need to do more to address that. However, my Department cannot do it alone.

Last year, a higher education widening participation regional strategy group was established, including the formation of four expert working groups, comprising relevant experts from education, the public and private sectors and other Departments, to consider the issues involved and to examine a new approach. In March 2011, a public consultation paper was launched, offering a different vision of the higher education sector and targeting people who are the most able but least likely to participate in order to ensure that they be given every encouragement and support to achieve the qualifications and the confidence to apply to higher education.

The draft consultation document proposed a new regional awareness campaign for adults and young people to improve understanding of the relevance and benefits of higher education to the individual. It proposed better outreach from the higher education institutions to local communities, including employers, workers and adult returners, as well as young people from areas where there are low participation levels. The strategy for widening participation and an associated implementation plan will be incorporated into the higher education strategy for Northern Ireland, which I intend to publish in early 2012. It will address the issues outlined in the consultation document to maintain and to develop participation rates across society.

In conclusion, freedom of choice, including the choice of one's preferred university, is a central tenet of our society. However, the key to our future economic success will be the promotion of equality of opportunity for all sections of our population. My Department is sharply focused on addressing issues of under-representation wherever they occur, irrespective of religion, so that issues of low aspiration and other barriers to success are addressed and not seen to hold back any of our young people from realising their full potential.

I hope that the statistics and research that I outlined show that it is wrong for people to portray an underlying religious divide in our higher education sector. Indeed, raising undue uncertainty and concern in the student population can have only a damaging effect on the higher education sector. We must send out the message that we are focused on having a world-class education and training system in Northern Ireland that is open and accessible to all. Indeed, that is critical if we are to have the world-class economy that we all deserve.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister and the proposer of the motion. At times, many of us feel uncomfortable addressing such matters because they bring an inevitable perception of issues being dealt with in terms of sectarianism, which is the last message that the Assembly wants to send out. However, if issues need to be addressed, they must be looked at and tackled head on.

As issues emerged and evolved during the debate, I felt as though we were almost living in parallel worlds, those of perception and reality, so I was glad to hear the Minister's words. However, the perception must also be addressed. I was glad that the Minister reinforced the view that our concern should be that our student population feels comfortable, confident and adept at developing the necessary skills to help themselves and, indeed, society throughout their lives.

The Minister referred to the need for a sustainable, competitive economy and for a highly skilled workforce. He also referred to a fact that seems to have been missed during the debate: participation in higher education by people from a Protestant background is broadly in line with the composition of the population. During the debate, I was almost blinded by stats, but I picked up the Minister's general thread and was glad to hear him outline those matters.

Mr Douglas specifically mentioned that based on free-school-meals criteria, only 4% of university entrants are from a Protestant working-class background. The Assembly must return to that issue to try to tackle it because some Members appear to have missed it and others ignored it during the debate. It is inevitable that the issue will be discussed.

Mr Campbell referred to the topic being debated two years ago, and here we are again. He mentioned a skills and knowledge gap and a disparity in information dissemination. I do not know why that should be the case or why some schools do not avail themselves of information. Perhaps the universities should address the problem. If that is an issue, it must be addressed because people must have access to as much information as possible about universities, bursaries and financial matters in order to help them through life. From Mr Campbell's comments, I picked up the fact that there were issues about previous freshers' weeks, and I hope that any perceptions remain in the past.

The matter is much wider than simply numbers and stats, and Mr Lyttle took a wise approach by broadening the issue to include child poverty, early years and the involvement of the Department of Education.

It broadens its remit right throughout other Departments. It is important that we look at such issues as the participation of grammar and secondary schools and the figures that Mr Lyttle gave on educational attainment standards in those schools. The value of education, poverty, parental values and, indeed, wider community issues are very important factors in seeking to address the matter and to bring people to the point where they feel valued, where educational values are upheld in their communities and, more importantly, where society as a whole benefits from that.

12.00 noon

In proposing amendment No 2, my colleague Mr Ramsey discussed where there is disparity or the perception of disparity with regard to the number of students from Protestant backgrounds. He referred specifically to very good work that has been done at the University of Ulster's Magee campus. He also referred to its work with the local community and people from different backgrounds in Derry.

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

Mr McGlone: In conclusion, a Phriomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, I say that my party proposes its amendment. In view of all the wider issues that need to be incorporated into the motion, we stand by that amendment.

Mr Lyttle: I thank all Members who contributed to the debate. I continue to urge the House to consider and to support the Alliance Party's amendment as it stands.

On that note, I thank Mr Gregory Campbell MLA for citing the need for close co-operation between DEL and the Department of Education in order to tackle the problem. I also thank Mr Pat Ramsey MLA for referencing the need for early intervention and a focus on the post-primary sector if the Assembly is really to provide a solution to the problem.

I thank Mrs Sandra Overend MLA for reminding the House that it is in danger of sounding like a broken record on the issue and that it needs to work together as an Assembly and an Executive to bring forward real solutions.

Ms Michelle Gildernew MLA referenced statistics on the demographics that are at play in the issue. We take note of them as well. Mr Alastair Ross MLA referred to the need to improve educational aspiration at an early stage of the education system and for the Assembly to take that particular issue seriously. My East Belfast colleague Mr Sammy Douglas MLA

quoted some important comments from the Equality Commission and Bob Collins, which did, indeed, illustrate the fact that an imbalance in educational outcomes goes way beyond university education and that the Assembly must take serious heed of that. Some time ago, Mr Douglas was involved in research into poverty amongst plenty. Therefore, he is aware of and familiar with the issue. Hopefully, we can work together to tackle the real consequences of educational disadvantage.

I thank the Minister and the Department for their continued work to assist pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is important that the Assembly puts on record its support for the University of Ulster's innovative Step-Up programme, which provides a double award A level in applied science. That exposes young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to real academic and vocational experience of STEM skills at an early stage, in a university setting and with industry relevance, in order to increase vastly their chances of availing themselves of the university experience. Indeed, 97% of participants progress to higher education and go on to study in fields such as biomedical science, ICT, engineering and maths — all industry-relevant skills with real employment prospects.

In conclusion, we have heard some disputed statistics in the debate. I urge people to examine the statistics closely. There is evidence to suggest that, generally speaking, the make-up of the student population at university level is broadly representative of the community. However, most Members have recognised a more fundamental problem, which is educational disadvantage in certain groups; most notably, working-class males.

Indeed, Ms Michelle Gildernew MLA recognised the need for early intervention long before university and was supported by Alastair Ross MLA, who cited as potential solutions the further roll-out of Home-Start and Sure Start and really drilling down to tackle poverty, encouraging parental participation and tackling some in-school factors.

All those solutions will require Executive co-operation, including from the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department of Education and OFMDFM, and I hope that in supporting the Alliance Party amendment today, we can send out a clear message to the public that this Assembly is up to the challenge and that we will provide a world-class system with equality of educational opportunity for all our children and young people regardless of community background.

Mr McQuillan: I thank everybody for taking part in the debate. I thank my colleague Gregory Campbell for proposing the debate and thank the Minister for giving up his time and sitting through it.

Some weeks ago, it was unfortunate to hear that inequality and difference continue to exist in our education system, namely in our universities. The information revealed in the headline stated that our universities in Northern Ireland are home to only 40% Protestants. That is grossly worrying, not only from the point of view of equality but because of the number of young people from a Protestant background who are failing to pursue further or higher education. A report written by three academics — two from the University of Ulster and one from Queen's University in Belfast — revealed that more students from a Roman Catholic background were likely to be determined stayers whereas those from a Protestant background were more likely to be classed as determined leavers. That is very worrying.

I will now touch on some comments that have been made this morning. Gregory Campbell proposed the motion, and he started off by saying that the issue was debated in the Chamber about two years ago and that nothing had really been done since then. He hoped that, with it being debated again today, Mr Farry would take the issue on board and do something. He highlighted that 2,500 students from Northern Ireland study at university in Liverpool and a further 1,500 study in Glasgow. He said that that is no bad thing but it is unfortunate that a lot of those students are not returning home and that, mainly, we want to try to keep as many of those academics as possible in education here. He mentioned how Magee college had improved over the past few years but not to the extent that it needs to. Mr Allister made an intervention to highlight that the campus at Jordanstown was more fitted to attracting students from the Republic of Ireland than Protestant students from Northern Ireland. That is a worrying fact as well.

Mr Lyttle proposed amendment No 1 and said that the Assembly needs to deliver a first-class education system, and everybody agreed with

that. We all agree that there has to be equality and quality in the system. He went on to quote some figures and finished off by saying that an OFMDFM child poverty action plan is needed and that the transfer of children at the age of 14 would help as well.

Pat Ramsey moved amendment No 2. Mr Ramsey is very sympathetic to the cause. Although he agreed with a lot of what Mr Campbell said, he still did not really outline his reasons for wanting to leave out the word "concern". That continued throughout the debate.

Barry McElduff spoke next, and this was the one chance for Sinn Féin to prove to us all that it is really serious about equality. It failed to take that chance today, and Mr McElduff made light of the motion and said that it was something sectarian, which it certainly is not. He went on to raise some issues. However, Sinn Féin missed the boat and did not get the real meaning of the motion at all.

Sandra Overend said that this issue had been debated before in the Assembly and criticised the DUP for bringing it forward. I do not apologise one single bit for bringing this motion forward and being part of it. It is a very serious matter that we need to talk about. When Alastair Ross intervened to ask her who the Minister was during the last mandate, she admitted that it was Sir Reg Empey and that he did not do very much about this. He actually ignored the situation.

Tom Buchanan welcomed the debate and outlined some figures. I cannot read my own writing here; that is the problem.

I will move on to Michelle Gildernew's contribution. She did not pick up what the debate was all about and said that Mr John Simpson had once said that within a five mile radius of this place, there were people who were unfit for education. She said that the figures were all a bit misleading, so Sinn Féin again questioned the figures.

Alastair Ross turned to the two amendments and what the debate was all about. He stated that Sinn Féin was against the motion. He said that he had studied in Dundee but always had it in his head to return to Northern Ireland, which is a very welcome attitude.

Sammy Douglas quoted Bob Collins of the Equality Commission and said that Bob Collins had agreed that there was a disparity and that something needed to be done about it.

Jim Allister said that this was an important debate and that some did not live up to that. He asked how Jordanstown was fit to attract 2,800 students from the Republic of Ireland but not enough from a Protestant background in Northern Ireland. He said that the SDLP should not push its amendment and that although Sinn Féin Members would shout about inequalities at any other time in this House, they failed to live up to that today.

The Minister said a lot. He urged us not to look into figures so deeply, then he went on to quote a powerful lot of figures. He said a lot, but, he did not say very much, and that was a bit disappointing.

Mr McGlone gave the winding-up speech on amendment No 2, but he still did not tell us why the SDLP want to drop the words "with concern". Chris Lyttle then gave a winding-up speech on amendment No 1.

Let me make it clear that the DUP supports the motion as it appears on the Order Paper and is not accepting either amendment.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that if the amendment is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2 as the wording to which it relates will have been deleted.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 33; Noes 58.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Cochrane and Mr Lyttle.

NOES

Mr Allister, Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Flanagan,

Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lewis, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Buchanan and Mr McQuillan.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes with concern the disparity in the number of students from a Protestant background attending universities in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to explore why this is the case and to bring forward a strategy to address the issue.*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business after lunch will be Question Time. The sitting is, by leave, suspended. *[Interruption.]* Nobody is listening to me.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Mr Speaker: Questions 1 and 5 have been withdrawn. Question 1 requires a written answer, and question 5 is being dealt with. The Member who was due to ask question 2 is not in his place.

Fuel Poverty

3. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has held discussions with any other Departments about tackling fuel poverty. (AQO 753/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The cross-cutting nature of tackling fuel poverty means that all Departments must work together to ensure that progress is made on that crucial issue. I, alongside my officials, have had discussions with other Departments, including the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Recently, I chaired a meeting of the interdepartmental group on fuel poverty, which will merge with the fuel poverty advisory group to form a single forum. That will be a more focused group and, I believe, will work more efficiently. My Department is working closely with OFMDFM to discuss options to utilise the social protection fund in that regard.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for his reply. Can he provide more detail on his short-term, medium-term and long-term strategy for tackling what is a pressing problem in the community?

Mr McCausland: The Department has a number of initiatives that address fuel poverty in different ways. First, the primary tool in tackling fuel poverty is the warm homes scheme, which offers insulation and heating measures to vulnerable householders who are in receipt of a qualifying benefit. In addition, the Housing Executive continues to roll out its annual heating replacement scheme for its tenants. The

Northern Ireland sustainable energy programme also funds schemes that offer assistance to a range of householders, and further information on those schemes is available through a free phone number, 0800 512012. We also have a pilot boiler replacement scheme, and that will be assessed in connection with the warm homes scheme. Alongside that, my Department runs an annual benefit uptake campaign, which encourages people to claim their full benefit entitlement and administers the winter fuel payment and cold weather payments.

Three areas of fuel poverty need to be addressed: one is to maximise income, and the benefit uptake campaign focuses on that; secondly, you want houses to be as energy-efficient as possible, and we are dealing with that through the measures that I outlined; the third is the cost of fuel. Those are the three things that contribute to fuel poverty.

On cost, there are some explorations regarding brokering schemes for energy. We have had contact with businesses that are introducing products that will help to deal with some of the difficulties regarding the purchase of oil, and so on. We are doing a number of things and, together, they constitute our overarching approach to fuel poverty.

Mr Easton: Has the Minister been in contact with any private sector companies to see whether there are any solutions towards helping those who are having the most difficulty with high energy costs?

Mr McCausland: I have met Kingspan Environmental and Carillion Energy Services on the issue of emergency oil drums. I have also held exploratory talks with their representatives on the implementation of a pay-as-you-go system for oil heating. That is a very exciting proposal, with the potential to make significant savings to homes that struggle to afford large fills of oil and, consequently, rely on purchasing smaller drums. Those drums cost significantly more per litre, and many Members will have had representation to their constituency advice centres on that issue and met people in their constituencies who have identified that as a problem. It places more pressure on already struggling incomes. There are early indications that the oil industry is also keen to be involved in that proposal, and I am confident that significant progress will be made in the coming months. I will keep Members updated.

I also visited the Dimplex factory, where they are working on much more energy efficient heaters, and Kingspan has its system for the solar heating of water. I understand that there are a number of other examples, such as that from Mitsubishi for piloting heat pumps, which we also want to explore.

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister for his answers. Does the Minister agree with me that the Committee for Social Development's fuel poverty event in the Long Gallery tomorrow night is a means of bringing different communities together? Will he be involved in that event?

Mr McCausland: I welcome the Committee's event tomorrow evening. I understand that arrangements mean that there may be an Executive meeting at that very time. My intention was to be at the event, which was in my diary, but I think that the other meeting may have precedence on this occasion. However, I wish the event well.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Does he agree that recent press reports, albeit that they are unsubstantiated, indicate that Northern Ireland, which has 2% of the UK's population, may endure 30% of the cold-weather-related deaths and that that is an indictment of the Executive's effort thus far to eradicate that scourge?

Mr McCausland: You can either go around speculating and trying to frighten people or you can do something about it.

It is good to see that Basil McCrea has now arrived in the Chamber. He obviously cannot read his own watch because he was not able to be here on time for his question.

It is good to be focused on dealing with problems. That is why, in this instance, I was able to identify to the Assembly the very strategic things that we as a Department are doing and the things that others are doing. I was also able to identify the practical measures that the Department and others are taking, as well as to note the excellent work that a number of private sector companies are doing and that we want to highlight. Yes, there is a problem with fuel poverty, but as the Member identified at the start of her question, some of the things that she was suggesting may well be unconfirmed.

Ms Lo: I understand that a strand under the Executive's green new deal was meant to

upgrade homes to make them more energy efficient but that that has been stored. Will the Minister elaborate on that, please?

Mr McCausland: The business case for the green new deal was rather late in arriving; it arrived with us only in the past few weeks. My officials are looking through it at the moment, and the economists are also going through it. I do not want to see us focus our attention on creating infrastructures; I want to see us delivering practical things that will make a real difference. We will certainly do whatever we can in that regard. However, the green new deal to which the Member refers arrived with us only the other week. It was to be with us, I think, before the summer.

Motability Cars

4. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister for Social Development how many Motability cars have been supplied in each of the last three years. (AQO 754/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Motability is an independent voluntary organisation that is responsible for the administration of the Motability contract hire scheme. My Department does not hold information on the number of Motability cars supplied in the past three years. That information may be obtained directly from Motability.

In the past five years, my Department transferred the following amounts to the Motability scheme: in 2006-07, the figure was £600,000; in 2007-08, it was £861,000; in 2008-09, it transferred £1,097,000; in 2009-2010, the figure dropped slightly to £1,058,000; and for 2010-11, it was £1,003,000. That gives us some indication of the scale of the Motability scheme in Northern Ireland.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his answer. Obviously, proposed changes to disability living allowance (DLA) will have an impact across the entire system, including Motability. Will the Minister outline what changes are being made to disability living allowance by the introduction of personal independence payments?

Mr McCausland: It is proposed that the personal independence payment will replace DLA for working age claimants from 2013-14, and it will be payable to people in and out of work.

Personal independence payments will be available to people who have a long-term health condition or impairment and will be closely targeted at disabled people in greatest need, supporting those who encounter the greatest difficulties in leading full and independent lives. There will be two components: a mobility component based on an individual's ability to move around and a daily living component based on an individual's ability to carry out a range of key everyday activities.

Entitlement will depend on the outcome of a new objective assessment, which will use evidence from claimants, independent healthcare professionals and other support workers to deliver more consistent outcomes and greater transparency for individuals. A number of current Northern Ireland DLA cases are being used in the development of the new assessment criteria, and those in the most difficult circumstances will continue to be supported by special rules for terminally ill people.

The Department for Work and Pensions Minister with responsibility for disability, Maria Miller, is in Northern Ireland tomorrow, and I will be meeting her to highlight the particular impacts that could potentially be felt by people in Northern Ireland as a result of the changes.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the intention of the present assessment of DLA and of the proposed changes to DLA in the welfare reform legislation is to move as many people as possible off that benefit and that that will have a knock-on impact on the supply on much-needed forms of transport?

Mr McCausland: The Member is getting to the heart of the whole issue of welfare reform. I believe very much that there is a need for a reform of the welfare system, but that is not the same as welfare reform as envisaged by the coalition Government at Westminster.

There are certain things in the proposals around universal credit that are good, such as facilitating people back into work and removing the benefit trap, and we should recognise that. However, there are other things that are quite clearly intended by the coalition Government to be a cost-saving exercise. Removing those people from the benefit system is clearly a cost-saving measure on the part of the Government.

Mrs McKevitt: Does the Minister agree that the Motability scheme is successful?

Mr McCausland: The Department's role in the scheme is to provide the funding. It is a privately run scheme, and it certainly brings benefit to the individuals who receive the vehicles. I do not know what the outcome regarding the scheme will be in the longer term. We will have to wait and see. There have been examples of certain abuses of the system. We are all only too well aware of that, and it is something that needs to be borne in mind. However, in any system, you will always find people who are willing to abuse it.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Welfare Reform

6. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the levels of communication between the Department for Work and Pensions, his Department and the Committee for Social Development on the issue of welfare reform. (AQO 756/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Officials from my Department have regular and ongoing communication with the Department for Work and Pensions. As I already mentioned, I will be meeting Maria Miller tomorrow. I would be surprised if there was not daily contact at some level.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Social Security Agency are represented at a wide range of meetings and workshops at all levels with the Department for Work and Pensions. That is done to inform the introduction of welfare reform.

Departmental officials, along with representatives from the Social Security Agency, have also scheduled a number of meetings with the Social Development Committee over the next two months to brief it on key elements of the upcoming Welfare Reform Bill. I take the opportunity to reaffirm the point that we need to draw a distinction between the reform of the welfare system, which we think is a good and necessary thing, and what is being proposed as welfare reform by the coalition Government, because they are not the same.

Mr McNarry: I appreciate the Minister's response. I wonder whether I could tempt him to go a little bit further for the House and clarify how the particular needs of Northern Ireland, having been identified by him, will be taken into account in the overall formulation of UK welfare policy.

Mr McCausland: In developing the policy, work is ongoing at Westminster to determine how decisions taken on particular benefits will work out on the ground. As the community profile and demographics of Northern Ireland are different, it is important that we, and the folk at Westminster, understand how the proposed changes will work, not just in Great Britain but in Northern Ireland. The particular circumstances of Northern Ireland are being taken into account, which is why we have such a high level of input from staff in the Social Security Agency and DWP almost daily.

2.15 pm

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am pleased to hear that the Minister is not that happy with the proposed changes. My question follows on from Mr McNarry's supplementary question. Has the Minister had a specific discussion with his counterpart in the Department for Work and Pensions on how severely the benefit cuts will impact on a wide range of citizens in this jurisdiction?

Mr McCausland: It is difficult to be clear about the precise impact at this stage. Any precise measurement will be very difficult until we are further down the track and have seen more detail on the precise changes being made. Calculations have to be done, which will involve staff from here working with the folks in London. There will, undoubtedly, be a major impact but the extent of that is very difficult for me to determine at this stage.

Mr D McIlveen: Does the Minister have any proposals on how to reduce the burden that the proposed reforms will place on the most vulnerable?

Mr McCausland: I am aware of the concerns being voiced about certain aspects of the reform programme. Although I fully support the principles behind the positive elements of the reform, which are to incentivise individuals to take up work and to ensure that work always pays, I am mindful of those who justifiably rely on the welfare state for essential support. We have had some discussions with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister about the social protection fund, particularly on how we can utilise it and other mechanisms to provide support as necessary. The aim is to ensure that the already vulnerable will not be further marginalised.

Mr Durkan: One key element of welfare reform will be the transition to universal credit. Although a single payment has undoubted benefits, there are risks involved. Does the Minister have any plans to mitigate the risks that may result from people receiving all their benefits, as the title suggests, in one go? That could lead to further debt and poverty, particularly given the lack of a financial capability strategy here.

Mr McCausland: Interestingly, I was discussing financial capability with some folk earlier this morning. That issue has not been forgotten.

The transition to a single payment will, undoubtedly, bring change but part of the thinking behind it is to increase financial responsibility. It is good to teach people to be financially responsible and how to manage money. On the other hand, I am sure that we can all think of particularly vulnerable sectors of society, where the arrival of a single payment may lead to money not being used in the way that was intended. That is a matter of concern to all of us, and we highlighted to Westminster the fact that it must be taken into account. That will not apply only here but across the United Kingdom. There are going to be questions about the ability of some people who are vulnerable and who may not have the capability to handle that payment.

Single payment means that all the payments will come to one person in the family. In families, it is quite often the woman who looks after the financial matters. That is certainly the case in my home; my wife looks after the cheque book. I think that that happens in a lot of homes. Issues such as to whom the payment is made are a cause of concern.

Alcohol Pricing

7. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposal for introducing a minimum price per unit of alcohol. (AQO 757/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Through his chairmanship of the city council of Londonderry's civic alcohol forum, the Member will be aware of the impact that alcohol has on society and the need to take action to tackle alcohol misuse.

A joint DSD/Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety consultation on the introduction of minimum pricing for alcohol and other alternative measures to tackle the availability of cheap alcohol ended on 26 June. Responses are being analysed, and an options paper is being developed for consideration by the Health Minister and I before a decision on the way forward is taken. As that measure is intended to help to protect and to improve public health, any proposed legislation will be brought forward by the Health Department.

I am sure that the Member noted in last night's 'Belfast Telegraph' the reference to the fact that alcohol abuse claims an average 266 lives in Northern Ireland every year. There is a great human cost as well as the financial cost. The newspaper article also stated that 140,000 sick days a year could be attributed to alcohol misuse, and it quotes the chairman of the British Medical Association's public health committee in Northern Ireland as saying:

> *"The figures are truly shocking and entirely preventable. Doctors are increasingly saddened and frustrated at seeing increasing illness due to alcohol misuse in all age groups."*

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he provide the House with an appraisal of the social responsibility levy?

Mr McCausland: At the moment, the social responsibility levy applies to public houses. They have that levy built into the rates that they pay; they pay more than others. The problem, in large measure, is that the nature of the alcohol trade in Northern Ireland has changed dramatically. The focus has moved away from public houses to off-licences and, in particular, the large supermarkets, which, at the moment, do not pay that levy. That could well be looked at.

We need to take a holistic view of this. There are a number of sectors within the trade. There are issues about the cross-border trade in alcohol. We need to look at what happens across the border in the Irish Republic, and we need to look at Scotland. All those things are being taken into account. We need to take a comprehensive approach to address what is a substantial problem.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his responses. Has an impact assessment been carried out on how the proposals would affect the pub trade? I ask that because all of us have seen recently a number of scary figures regarding potential job losses in the industry.

Mr McCausland: Over the past number of months, I have met representatives from a

range of organisations and businesses that are involved with the alcohol trade. The conversation with publicans, in particular, was quite helpful. Clearly, they are losing out to a number of others. The sector has contracted, and there are not the same numbers of people purchasing alcohol in public houses as there were in the past. I think that some of the changes that we are talking about introducing would benefit that sector because it is losing out substantially to the large supermarkets, as I said already, which are undercutting everyone else. No one could possibly compete with them, and that is the main source of the problem.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his answer, and find I myself somewhat edgy asking a supplementary. Does the Minister agree that the fight against the misuse — if that is the right word — of alcohol should also take into account jugs of cocktails, which can contain anything between 1 litre and 1·5 litres of generally non-described spirits and are sold in family restaurants, chain restaurants and nightclubs? The person who buys those jugs has absolutely no indication of the amount of alcohol contained in them, and I am told that the effects of drinking them are extreme.

Mr McCausland: I do not know whether the Member has a greater expertise in this field than I could possibly have, but minimum pricing is simply one aspect of this issue. The other aspect is clearly around the promotion of cheap alcohol that we see in nightclubs, and so on. That type of thing is clearly irresponsible. The other problem that we have relates to irresponsibility. That sort of thing should be taken into consideration when we look at the overall package of measures that will come forward in regard to alcohol abuse.

People who have a licence for premises need to realise and be made aware that those things should be taken into consideration when their licence is up for renewal. There are a whole range of issues around irresponsible promotions, minimum pricing and the sort of behaviour that the Member has identified. All those things need to be taken into account.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

8. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the eligibility criteria for the boiler replacement scheme.
(AQO 758/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The qualifying criteria for the pilot boiler replacement scheme have recently been amended and will now include people aged 60 and over who are in receipt of rates relief and people aged 70 and over who are in receipt of lone pensioner allowance and have a boiler that is at least 15 years old. Housing benefit is not a qualifying benefit for this pilot scheme. To date, there have been over 500 successful applications.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat as an fhreagra sin. I understand that the scheme has been amended, but given its restrictive nature, it is a bit worrying that many people are still ruled out. Given the level of need, does the Minister have any plans to look at expanding access to that important scheme?

Mr McCausland: It is a pilot scheme. The total amount of money available was £2 million, which we estimated would assist over 1,300 households. It is a limited amount of money, and it is a modest scheme, but it is only a pilot scheme. The intention is to review the outworkings of the warm homes scheme and the boiler replacement scheme and to bring forward further proposals.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister give some consideration to extending the scheme to meet the needs of older people who suffer adversely in some of these situations?

Mr McCausland: The reply to that is something similar to the reply that I have just given, in that we have only a modest amount of money — £2 million — and we understand that that will assist over 1,300 households. It is a pilot scheme, and as we come to the end of it, the key thing is that we learn lessons and make sure that the pilot scheme and the warm homes scheme are amended to make them fit for purpose moving forward.

The long-term situation should be foremost in our minds. At this point, I am not minded to extend the scheme further unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary. However, the intention is to see the pilot scheme through to completion. Then there will be a review of the two schemes to see what can be done moving forward.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his widely known response. Can he detail how many boilers he expected to have replaced at this stage, and is he content with the current progress?

Mr McCausland: We estimated that the total amount of money would have assisted 1,300 households. The most recent figure that I have is that there have been 500 successful applications. By the end of the year, I hope that we will be well up towards our target.

2.30 pm

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Salmon Conservation

1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she expects to consult on a suite of robust and effective measures which will make a significant contribution to the drive to conserve salmon. (AQO 766/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for her question. The wild Atlantic salmon is an iconic species, and I am aware of widespread concern at the decline in the number of adult fish returning from the sea to spawn in our rivers. The UK, through the European Union, is party to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO), which aims to conserve, restore, enhance and rationally manage Atlantic salmon stocks through international procreation. DCAL is responsible for the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon in the North, and the EU expects it to work towards meeting the objectives of NASCO agreements and resolutions. The Department commissioned scientific research on the issue, and DCAL fisheries staff, working with Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) staff at the Bushmills salmon station, have undertaken long-term research into the ecology and population dynamics of wild Atlantic salmon. The results of that research are vital in informing the development of DCAL policy on the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon stocks, and the process is at an advanced stage. Departmental officials are preparing advice for my consideration on the way forward on any new measures proposed to enhance the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon stocks in the North.

Mrs Dobson: When does the Minister intend further to restrict the remaining commercial fisheries, particularly those identified as intercepting mixed salmon stocks?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member may be aware that, from 2001, the number of commercial fishing licences decreased from 55 to six, with five in full operation. That reduction was the result of a voluntary buyout scheme. Before we can suggest a way forward, we must wait for advice based on the research determining how great the impact is

Miss M McIlveen: Is the Minister aware of the ADSEA project led by the Ards and Down Salmonid Enhancement Association? Is she willing to meet the group involved to look at options for progressing the project with a view to creating a sea trout fishery in Strangford lough?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have met representatives from a few other projects, particularly those to do with recreational angling, but I am not aware of that project. Angling is part of their core business, but they also look at the countryside and environmental impacts. I am very keen to meet the group. I am not too sure about a proposed fishery. However, I suppose that the purpose of a meeting is for groups to put forward their proposals. Through officials, we will take steps if they are appropriate.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Aire, as an fhreagra sin. Will you detail why the wild Atlantic salmon stocks are in such a state of decline?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are a few reasons for the decline. The scientific evidence so far indicates that the decline in the number of salmon returning to our rivers is consistent with international evidence, which points to habitat degradation, pollution, barriers to migration, the imbalance of predator/prey relationships and ecosystems and recreational and commercial exploitation. There are also concerns about the survival rate of stocks during the marine phase of the salmon going back into the rivers. The decline is the focus of international research, which aims to better understand the reasons that I outlined and any additional factors.

Mr Allister: The use of drift nets continues, particularly along the County Antrim coast. Why has there been a successful buyout virtually everywhere else, yet the ravaging of the stocks by drift nets continues to affect the River Bush and Bushmills area of the north coast? When will the Minister take action?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I pointed out to Jo-Anne Dobson, the issue in 2001 was the 55 licences for fishing wild salmon commercially. Now, there

are six licences, five of which are active. If the Member has any specific information about activity outside the conditions of the licence, I would expect rather than encourage the Member to bring that forward so that I can pass it on. That applies to all Members. Those licences are regulated, and if there is any sign of their abuse or misuse it is incumbent on the Member to bring that information forward.

Sport: Volunteering

2. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the importance of volunteering within sport. (AQO 767/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The role of volunteers in our society is significant, and volunteers are to be commended for their active support and the roles that they play in many aspects of sport. I recognise that the development and maintenance of sport and sporting organisations in the North is heavily dependent on volunteering.

My sports strategy, Sport Matters, estimates that there are more than 5,000 sports clubs and over 100 recognised sporting activities in the North. The evidence that is available from Sport Matters also indicates that those organisations and activities are, in the main, volunteer-dependent. It is for that reason that Sport Matters identifies capacity building and the empowering of sports volunteers as a major issue in sport that needs to be tackled over the 10-year lifespan of the strategy.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I know that the Minister recently visited the excellent GAA conference in Armagh that dealt with volunteering. Does the Minister recognise any challenges that face sports volunteers in the North?

Ms Ní Chuilín: For the record, the GAA conference was a huge success. Well over 500 people, all of whom are volunteers in that particular sporting code, were at that conference at 9.00 on a Saturday morning.

There are many challenges to volunteering, mainly as a result of the fact that there are big expectations of the sporting bodies. The challenges are particularly in the areas of increased responsibility and accountability for governance requirements, child protection controls and health and safety compliance. There is also a greater expectation from funders and Departments that sporting bodies and volunteers will become more professional and take on leadership roles. We all recognise the role that volunteers play in the community, particularly in sport. However, those expectations place a considerable strain on existing sports volunteers. The introduction of the Sport Matters strategy and the prevalence of volunteers within it is timely and will hopefully place additional value on the role of volunteers in sport.

Mr Swann: Does the Minister agree that, if it were possible to reduce the financial burden on amateur clubs, volunteers could spend more time on coaching and engagement and less time on fundraising?

Ms Ní Chuilín: One of the contradictions that sports clubs have pointed out to me when I have met them is that, because many of their sports are not funded, they must fundraise, particularly for additional activities. They spend most of their time fundraising. They did not volunteer to be fundraisers; they volunteered to be coaches, to wash kits and to turn up and do whatever they can. I do not know how that balance will be struck for many of those clubs, but I encourage Sport NI to take a more prominent role in helping clubs. Some pressure needs to be taken off them so that they can get on with doing the work that they want to; after all, they volunteered and gave up their free time to do that.

Mr McDevitt: I want to add my voice to those who have paid tribute to the role that volunteers play in all our sports. The Minister will be aware that the World Police and Fire Games are coming to our shores next summer. Will she tell the House what specific steps she is taking to encourage the maximum number of volunteers to get involved in that important event?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The role of volunteers in the World Police and Fire Games will be immense, and volunteers will be key to that event. Approximately 5,000 volunteers will be needed, 1,500 of whom will assist in the delivery of sporting events, as, for example, technical volunteers such as referees, linespeople and so on. I have met representatives of Volunteer Now, the board of the World Police and Fire Games and members of some of the services that are competing in the games. A volunteer strategy has already been developed, and recruitment

will be open to all. The role that volunteers will play in the World Police and Fire Games in 2013, the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games in 2012 and the Commonwealth Games in 2014 will be absolutely pivotal.

GAA: Tyrone Centre of Excellence

3. **Mr Doherty** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department is assisting the Tyrone county board of the GAA with completion of the centre of excellence at Garvaghy. (AQO 768/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the North with responsibility for the distribution of funding. I am aware that the County Tyrone board has applied to Sport NI's Sport Matters community capital programme for assistance towards completing the centre of excellence at Garvaghy. I understand that that application exceeded the quality threshold and demonstrated a significant need for the facility. The difficulty is that sufficient funds are not available at present. The project has been placed on a call-off list for future funding, subject to available budgets.

Mr Doherty: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the Garvaghy project is an important development, not only for the GAA in Tyrone but for surrounding counties?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes, I agree. I, along with Barry McElduff and Michelle Gildernew, recently met the County Tyrone board on this matter. The initiative is primarily about sport but is also a cultural project to drive forward all aspects of GAA in County Tyrone and beyond. It will help to meet the ongoing demand for Gaelic games provision in the county at all levels for men and women and boys and girls. It will facilitate the cultural and heritage aspects of the GAA and the management of Gaelic games in the county, act as a regional GAA resource in Ulster and, indeed, provide a clear GAA brand in Tyrone. I think that it is an excellent project that, when fulfilled, will leave a lasting legacy for Gaels in County Tyrone.

Mr S Anderson: In light of the appalling levels of violence at GAA matches and particularly bearing in mind the incident at the weekend in County Tyrone, does the Minister agree that one of the first things that should be taught in any centre of excellence is the basic rule of behaviour on and off the field of play?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I listened to the chairperson of the Tyrone county board on the news last night and this morning. As far as I can ascertain from what he said, violence is the exception rather than the rule. For the record, I condemn all acts of violence. I condemn what happened at the weekend. Should it be in GAA games or whatever sport, it is totally unacceptable behaviour. I think that it was upsetting for everybody involved. It is not behaviour befitting Gaels or any sportspeople. I note that the GAA has acted promptly over such matters in the past. Indeed, it has imposed appropriate disciplinary sanctions, including lifetime bans. That is the type of clear message that will be sent. I noticed that this morning's news reports stated that a robust investigation is under way, and I am sure that we all await the result of that. If the point of the Member's question was to get me to do so, I have absolutely no difficulty in condemning what happened at the weekend.

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister accept that the facility at Garvaghy in Ballygawley is primarily for the youth development of young footballers in Tyrone? Will she consider visiting the facility to see what is on offer?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have already been asked by colleagues to visit Garvaghy and will do so, diary permitting. From what I have seen in my meetings with the county board and from the plans, I think that the facility will service the games that there are currently and, given its scale, will help to meet the county's assessed and ongoing needs. It will be a lasting legacy for young players and future players for that county.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome any promotion of excellence in sport. Will the Minister ensure that centres of excellence expand to include facilities for and to encourage other sports not necessarily linked to traditional GAA clubs?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I understand the point that the Member has made, but, in this case, I would have a brass neck to insist that the GAA does that, given the fact that DCAL has not put any money into the centre.

I understand that the Department's ongoing development of its Belfast pitches strategy is for a range of field games. There was an absolute lack of GAA facilities in Belfast, but that, thankfully, has started to be addressed. The GAA is looking at making those facilities multi-use. However, it is honestly not my place

to comment on whether this GAA facility, which is funded by Gaels, should be multi-use. I have no remit whatsoever to do so. Nevertheless, I congratulate the GAA on that work.

2.45 pm

Community Arts: County Fermanagh

4. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial assistance the Arts Council has provided to community arts projects in County Fermanagh over the past four years. (AQO 769/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council has provided almost £400,000 to community arts projects in County Fermanagh over the past four years. It has also provided an additional £193,000 in capital funds to the Clinton Centre in Fermanagh, which was completed in 2004. The centre is a multipurpose arts facility, including a community workshop and gallery space, which provides excellent arts facilities for local people in that area.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister provide details on which funding programmes were used to bring arts funding into County Fermanagh?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will personally write to the Member and include a detailed breakdown of all the funding programmes. I can, however, give him a snapshot of them. They are as follows: the musical instruments for bands scheme; the small grants programme; the Start Up programme, which aims to build capacity in the community and to develop new organisations; and lottery grants, which are distributed to various community arts organisations and projects.

Mrs McKevitt: Will the Minister provide a breakdown by constituency of the individuals and organisations that made a successful application to the creative industries innovation fund for 2011-12, which was administered by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, before the deadline of 25 August?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I think that the issue of the creative industries will be dealt with in a later question. I do not have information with me on the breakdown by constituency. However, even if I did, it would take me half an hour to read out the detail on some of the constituencies. Nevertheless, I am happy to furnish the Member with that detail.

Mr Speaker: To be fair to the Minister, that supplementary question was slightly outside the topic of the original question. I just want to make that point. It is very important that supplementary questions are, as far as possible, tied to the original question.

Once again, I say to Members that they need to continually rise in their place. Even if they catch my eye, they still have to rise in their place.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was trying to catch your eye so often that I had almost taken root.

I hope that the Minister will take half an hour to answer my question. What financial assistance has the Arts Council given to the Orange Institution, not just in Fermanagh but throughout Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sure that the Member knows that I do not have that information to hand. However, I will certainly write to him when I get it. As far as I know, quite a lot of money is going into it, but I am sure that the Member will probably feel that that is not enough. Nevertheless, I am happy to provide him with the detail.

Arts Funding

Mr McCarthy: Question 5. Yes, question 5.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is question 5, Kieran, you're grand. It is on my list too anyway.

5. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will consider allowing arts groups to access funding on a longer-term basis. (AQO 770/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department delivers support for the arts through the Arts Council. I am pleased to be able to update the Member about a recent change that will provide arts organisations with longer-term funding awards. A recent evaluation of the Arts Council's major funding programme, the annual support for organisations programme (ASOP), carried out by officials recommended that the Arts Council should extend the usual one-year award under ASOP to reduce uncertainty and the administrative burden on arts organisations. The Arts Council had been considering such a move and has implemented a change that will see

awards made to arts organisations for a three-year period from April 2012 to March 2015. The programme is currently open for applications.

Mr McCarthy: I am delighted to hear the answer. That three-year period will give all arts groups the opportunity to plan well in advance. The Minister will know that funding for arts groups has been cut, so at least that move will give them the opportunity to plan. Does the Minister agree that further future planning is in the interests not only of arts groups but of tourism, which we are trying to promote in Northern Ireland?

Mr Speaker: The Minister has enough to go on to answer the question. Move on.

Mr McCarthy: The arts groups will have that time in which to plan.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I appreciate the sentiments behind the Member's question. He has raised the issue previously, particularly for community-based organisations. In this instance, arts groups face a somewhat uncertain future because of annual funding. By the time that arts groups complete their evaluations, it is almost time to reapply. Similar issues were raised earlier about volunteering. It puts an inordinate burden on people and restricts their ability to plan and develop future programmes. This is good news. I cannot comment on tourism, but funding periods of more than one year — if possible, at least three years — would give groups the opportunity to get on with their work, deliver, monitor, evaluate and plan for the future.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí sin. Will the Minister outline the strategic approach to arts funding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I recently reviewed the Arts Council's business plans, and I will ensure that its priorities are in line with mine before giving final approval. I am also considering the results of the ASOP review. My officials are working with the Arts Council to develop its new five-year strategy, which will cover the period from 2012 to 2017. In fairness to the Arts Council — credit where it is due — its approach to governance and the provision of strategic support for groups has been exemplary. I am confident and look forward to reading its new plan on the way ahead.

Mrs Overend: Does the Minister accept that new groups as well as those that have been in existence for some time must have access to funds and that, that being the case, quality must be considered in funding decisions?

Ms Ní Chuilín: New groups should have access to funding. The perception is that some programmes are closed. Indeed, technically, some are closed: once a group is in, that is what happens. Therefore, I encourage Members to support groups in their area that have not previously applied to apply now. Funding rounds are competitive, and applications are made on the basis that they compete with others for funding. Applications are based on criteria and nothing else.

Mr Eastwood: Can I ask the Minister how many local arts groups face closure this year because of a lack of funding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not aware that any arts group faces closure because of withdrawal of funding by the Arts Council. If the Member knows of specific cases to do with Arts Council or other DCAL funding, I am happy to meet him and offer a bit of support. I have heard about lots of threats in the past, and we try to find the basis and evidence for those. However, there is nothing on my desk at the minute.

Creative Industries

6. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the work that she is undertaking to recognise the rate of growth in the creative industries. (AQO 771/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The creative industries are recognised locally and internationally for their potential for job and wealth creation. They also stimulate wider innovation and export-focused growth and can therefore make a major contribution to rebuilding and rebalancing the economy. As government lead on the creative industries, my Department actively stimulates collaboration between industry, government and academia to support and grow the local sector.

The creative industries innovation fund has been relaunched to support creative businesses, in particular export-focused and high-growth areas such as digital content. It seeks to encourage collaboration across the creative industries to develop new ideas and products capable of competing in global markets.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. Given that so many young people leave school without GCSEs and may find themselves unable to develop

within the creative industries, does the Minister agree with the former Education Minister, Caitríona Ruane, who last week at the OFMDFM Committee described the situation as criminal? Is that a reflection on Martin McGuinness's tenure as Education Minister?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As part of the creative industries, there is a phone application that will direct you to places; I must share that with you. The question was about creative industries, not about Caitríona Ruane or Martin McGuinness. If the Member is serious about young people, perhaps he will write to me instead of making cheap political points.

Mr I McCrea: In her answer to the initial question, the Minister referred to the creative industries innovation fund. Does she agree that a lot of collaborative work can be done with, for example, further education colleges to ensure that the areas to which Mr Nesbitt referred can be addressed? Can she give an update on the uptake of the fund?

Ms Ní Chuilín: With regard to uptake, £4 million has been set aside in the current Budget period for the creative industries innovation fund. I agree that development of the creative industries needs to be addressed through the curriculum in primary schools, post-primary schools and, indeed, further education colleges. To that end, I will have an initial series of meetings with my colleague John O'Dowd. After that, I will talk to Minister Farry.

Young people who use animations and graphics but do not have an interest in academia have shone, developed and flourished through the digital and creative industries. We hope to capture that in our work so that we can contribute to the development of talented young people who have nowhere to bring their talents and are not specifically supported by government. It is important that we try to join some of this stuff up and use the fund and any other opportunities that exist to support something that we currently talk about but have yet to take proper action on.

Mr Humphrey: I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council. The Minister will be aware of the tremendous work that the council has done on creative industries. Does she support the location of a digital hub for Belfast in North Belfast?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do, yes. All politics is local. I am aware of the tremendous work that Belfast City Council has done and continues to do. In fact, its work has been an exemplar to many people. Creative hubs, particularly in deprived areas, are part of the future. Setting aside the fact that I am one of the six MLAs for North Belfast and that the hub would be situated right in the heart of my constituency, areas such as Girdwood are ideal for the creation and development of digital knowledge and information and, indeed, the digital economy, particularly given that the lack of investment in those areas has continued. That is one way in which the area could be enhanced.

Cross-departmental Links

7. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department is doing to develop cross-departmental links and initiatives to ensure that the professional arts and theatres are included in strategic planning for the whole cultural economy. (AQO 772/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department plays a key role in the Executive's plans for building our cultural economy. I recognise the arts' ability to drive social and economic regeneration in our towns and cities. The arts infrastructure of theatres and other arts facilities also contribute to the North's growing reputation as an exciting and vibrant place for tourists to visit.

My Department is involved in a number of key projects with cross-departmental links and objectives. The Cultural Olympiad provides an opportunity to celebrate and showcase our diversity in culture, people and languages. My officials also work closely with DETI on the new regional economic strategy and the Tourism 2020 strategy to ensure that the arts and creative industries form a key part of future cultural and economic development plans.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her response. Given Northern Ireland's great success in hosting the MTV European music awards, is the Minister taking steps to replicate that success in other ways and to help to promote and grow the cultural economy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is also in the Chamber, and I am sure that she also heard the Member's comments. The success of Departments and agencies working together to promote what we

have in the North and to use it to its best possible potential was clear at the MTV awards. As the Member will know, there will be celebrations next year for the Titanic, the Cultural Olympiad and the Olympics. In April, MTV will return, albeit on a smaller scale. There will be many opportunities in 2012, 2013 and 2014 for Departments, through tourism, arts and, indeed, good and better relations, to promote arts and cultural opportunities for the North.

3.00 pm

Private Members' Business

Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges

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

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the importance of affordable telecommunication costs to achieving economic recovery; welcomes the recent reductions in roaming charges across Europe; further welcomes the European Commission's plans to abolish roaming charges by 2015; and calls for the immediate introduction of an all-Ireland telecommunications tariff to expedite this objective.*

Tá áthas an domhain orm a bheith anseo leis an rún a mholadh. I am very happy to be here to move the motion, and I am happy that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is here to listen and to respond to it because I know that it personally affects her in my constituency. In fact, I share the constituency with her, so I will not claim it as my own.

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

Roaming is a massive problem for residents in border areas, for those who have to cross the border to do business and for our local economy as a whole. Roaming charges are an unfair private taxation on customers who make phone calls, send texts or transfer mobile data to or from another part of this island. In 2007 alone, £11 million was removed from our local economy through inadvertent roaming, which is when mobile phones choose a roaming network without someone having actually crossed the border. Inadvertent roaming is a completely separate issue to the one that we are here to discuss, but that figure paints a picture of the magnitude of the effect that roaming has on our economy.

Introducing legislation to deal with roaming charges is primarily a matter for the European Commission, and efforts have been made to reduce the costs that roaming customers pay. That progress is very welcome. However, we need much more co-operation from the mobile phone industry. Since the first legislation to cap roaming rates was introduced in 2007, there have been significant reductions in the charges per minute and per text. However, there have also been massive jumps in the use of data, including sending and receiving e-mails and the use of social media on a smartphone.

That increase in data usage will undoubtedly be at a massive cost to our local economy, and the actual figure is bound to be much more than the £11 million that Ofcom predicted in 2007. We cannot just stand by and allow such money to flow out of our economy. In a recent meeting with Ofcom to discuss the motion, I asked it to try to update that figure in its next communications market report, and I look forward to seeing the results of that.

The European Commission has introduced plans to reduce roaming, and one of its current proposals is to abolish it by 2015. However, steps need to be taken by the mobile phone industry to deal with the issue of roaming in advance of that. We cannot simply sit back, wait for 2015 to come and wonder how that will happen. The European Commissioner for Digital Agenda has described the price gap between domestic mobile charges and roaming rates as unjustifiably high. She has suggested that the mobile phone market in Europe is dominated by a few large players such as Orange, Vodafone and O2, which means that there is too little competition on prices. It is clear that pressure needs to be brought to bear on mobile phone operators.

Poland has the presidency of the European Union and has brought forward proposals to reduce difficulties with cross-border transactions and roaming charges. I welcome such moves. Being from a border county, I know the extreme challenges in electronic services being faced by families and businesses who straddle the border. The border continues to be a financial burden on families and restricts businesses. It is, therefore, important that barriers are removed to cross-border electronic services and internet access.

Although recent reductions to roaming costs are welcome, they fall well short of what is required, especially at a time when electronic communications and services have overtaken fixed line and manual services and when the knowledge economy is increasingly becoming available through mobile phones and on the internet. How on earth can normal trade relations be established when the commercial sector is being penalised in developing telecommunications contacts and operating with customers and suppliers in the rest of Ireland? In other parts of the world, mobile phone operators have taken steps to abolish roaming rates, including between Australia and New Zealand and between Finland and Russia, and similar steps need to be taken here.

In the past, some networks introduced bolt-ons to reduce roaming, meaning that some customers would not be charged extra to use their phones on the other side of the border. However, consumers have had to pay an additional fixed monthly rate for that. It was not available to all consumers, and there were a number of loopholes in those tariffs. It is clear that those measures did not go far enough. For example, consumers on a pay-monthly scheme who get an allocation of minutes and messages every month cannot use that allocation in the South. They were charged to make calls, send texts and use data whether or not they had a bolt-on. That is wrong, and the industry has to tackle that issue.

Take O2, for example, which has two thirds of the market share here and one third of the market in the South. When an O2 customer here roams on to O2 Ireland, they are charged the maximum legal roaming rate. However, O2 incurs no additional costs as a result of that roaming. It does not have to pay costs to any other network or operator. Any charge incurred is all profit, and it goes straight to Telefónica, the parent company of both operators. That is sheer greed and profiteering at our expense. The money does not even stay in the local economy but goes off to the head office in Spain. It is not used to improve infrastructure or mobile phone coverage in border areas. That is a ridiculous situation and is not something that we should tolerate.

I know that I singled out O2, but Vodafone, Three, Orange and T-Mobile are no better in their attitudes towards roaming, and neither are any of the Southern networks. Extortionate roaming rates have a massive impact on our ability to grow the island economy and to increase cross-border trade. They reduce our economic

competitiveness. Mobile phone operators need to do away with roaming rates, not only on the island of Ireland but across all Europe, and that needs to happen long before the target date of 2015. The best way for that to happen here is for an all-island telecommunications tariff to be put in place immediately.

I welcome the Dublin Government's commitment to work on the issue, and I hope that it is a priority that they will extend to the Irish presidency of the EU, which begins in 18 months. We have always advocated, for example, an all-island telecommunications market, and we hope that the EU can advance that project in co-operation with the industry. There can be no more profiteering at the expense of people in the border region at a time when we need to foster greater linkages and trade ties. If enough public and political pressure is brought to bear, there will be no difficulty in having complete ease of access to cross-border electronic services, whether you live in Cork or Belfast, Cavan or Enniskillen.

Finally, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, I will address the DUP amendment. I understand where it comes from, and I support the broad thrust of it. Sinn Féin will not make a big issue of the amendment and will not oppose it. However, I am personally disappointed that after criticising the SDLP for apparently bringing an all-island amendment to every single motion, the DUP submits an amendment that removes an all-island solution to a problem facing everyone — but then, that is politics for you.

Mr Newton: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after '2015;' and insert

> *"and calls on the mobile network operators to abolish roaming charges in advance of 2015; and further notes that regulation of telecommunications on a UK-wide basis is key to a competitive Northern Ireland marketplace."*

The issue before the Assembly is, indeed, a serious one. It is of concern to the business community and to the individual. It imposes a cost on business, on tourists who come here and on all who need to travel outside of or come to Northern Ireland. That cost is incurred even on occasions when you do not leave the jurisdiction. When you approach the border area and even before you move into the Republic, you can start to incur a cost.

The motion recognises the problem, but it presents as an answer a solution that the proposers know is impractical, without logic and not achievable. I will come back to that. The motion is political and has nothing to do with addressing the issue. If the proposers were serious about the issue, they would not have gone about it in this manner.

It is geared only to portray an all-Ireland approach to a solution, when the proposers know that it is not achievable. Indeed, it falls into the same category as a proposal from Sinn Féin just a week or two ago on an all-Ireland job creation strategy. It is the same type of approach.

I suppose that we should not be surprised at that. If you look back — I was going to say into the annals of history, but you do not actually have to go too far back to examine Sinn Féin's approach to the telecommunications industry. You have the telecommunications industry wanting to erect masts, and the opposition campaigns that were orchestrated against the erection of masts. Indeed, sometimes damage to masts occurred through and around that campaign. I believe that Sinn Féin carries some responsibility for that. That was the approach to the telecommunications industry, which is now recognised in the motion as being so important to the development of the economy. At one stage, they were going to stop the erection of telecommunication masts, and now we are recognising that they have come full circle and now want good communication systems. I suppose that we should be grateful for that.

We also remember that, not too long ago, there were proposals from Sinn Féin on an economic basis and to raise money for the economy that were actually going to put a tax on those who wanted to send text messages or use their mobile phones. We are now complaining at this stage about roaming charges.

Ms S Ramsey: I want to make two points. The Member said that we were happy to add an additional burden on people sending texts. I have a lot of respect for the Member as an individual, but if he goes back to the document, he will see that we were going to tax the telecommunications company, not individuals. On the second issue about the phone masts, you are absolutely right. I have been to the fore in opposing phone masts, like everybody in this Chamber, but it was about opposing phone masts that were being put in built-up areas. We

were giving alternative solutions to phone masts in our constituencies.

Mr Newton: I thank the Member for her intervention, but let me just ask this question: does anyone actually believe that a penalty put on to a phone supplier would not have resulted in that being put on to the user of a phone? Let us be honest about it. It is fairy-dust economics. That is what it is all about. It is not practical.

Mr McLaughlin: This is an interesting discussion. We supported the work that was done by the European Commission on roaming charges. We were also part of the lobby that drew attention to the significant profits from text messaging that were being made by the phone operators. It transpired that 10% of the bandwidths that were licensed were allocated for the management software that the companies were using, and it was actually the spare capacity, which was absolutely unproductive and not required by the mobile telephone service operators, that they used for the text messaging. So they were charging for a service that did not cost them a penny. What we were drawing attention to, which the European Commission was unable to get the mobile companies to divulge, was the vast profits that they were making from text messaging. The point —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I think that we need shorter interventions.

Mr McLaughlin: Let me finish with a point that you might want to address. The issue is that the phone companies would have had to justify any charges and to explain where the costs underlying them were. They are making vast fortunes from text messaging, for little outlay.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I think that we should return now to the amendment.

Mr Newton: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I have been extremely liberal, but I make the point that there is no legislation that makes the telecommunications companies justify their costs. They can charge — as they are doing — what they like, unless legislation is introduced to ensure that they do not.

3.15 pm

Let us inject a wee bit of realism into the debate. We are all aware that this is not a devolved matter and that the Assembly can have no real say in it. Telecommunications are regulated by Ofcom and the House has no powers to bring the mobile phone companies to book. We can express our concerns about issues, and have done so. The man in the street has expressed his concern that he is being ripped off. However, this is a matter for Ofcom, and the telecommunications companies will not change voluntarily until there is legislation that makes them change. As has been recognised by the proposer of the motion, the matter is one for the European Union.

The Assembly has no powers to regulate mobile phone companies that operate across national boundaries. They do so without any real cost to themselves while exploiting national boundaries, so that when you begin to roam, you incur an additional cost through the imposition of their additional tariffs. That is not a new subject in the Assembly; over the past number of years, questions have been asked of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment by Members from all sides of the House. Hansard records the concerns of Members and the actions of the Minister on the matter. Not so long ago, on 13 September 2011, Mr Pat Doherty asked the Minister:

> *"what discussions her Department has had with Ofcom, the mobile phone industry and the European Commission to secure a further reduction in roaming charges." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 66, p92-3, col 2].*

Sinn Féin recognised that it is an Ofcom problem. The Minister replied:

> *"That is not a devolved matter. However, I am in discussion with Ofcom regarding mobile phone coverage in Northern Ireland." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 66, p93, col 1].*

She also mentioned improving access to 3G services. In his supplementary question, Mr Doherty thanked the Minister for her answer, and asked, given that excessive roaming charges are a serious barrier to growing the economy, what steps the Minister was taking. The Minister replied:

> *"the matter was regulated by the European Union, which introduced a regulation in 2007 — amended in 2009 — on the maximum that could be charged". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 66, p93, col 1].*

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

Mr Newton: Sinn Féin knows where the answer to the motion lies. The answer is not contained in its motion.

Mr Nesbitt: First, I acknowledge Mr Newton's point that this is not a matter over which the House has any control. Indeed, were we to be discussing European matters, perhaps we might be better set to take a look at the implications for cohesion funding for 2014 and beyond, because I believe that that has very serious implications for the development of our economy. However, we are where we are.

We have a motion and an amendment, and I support the amendment rather than the motion. To explain why, perhaps, I could unpack the motion, which seems to come in four distinct parts. The first asserts:

> *"That the Assembly notes the importance of affordable telecommunication costs to achieving economic recovery".*

I can support that. Telecommunications is a massive industry, and its affordability undoubtedly has a role to play in economic recovery, given the detrimental effects that charges can have for businesses and tourists. In 2009, as I understand it, the EU market for mobile roaming services, which can be divided into voice, SMS and broadband, accounted for €4·777 billion in the retail market alone. Wholesale revenues came to €1·253 billion. It is a massive market that has implications for Northern Ireland.

The second part of the motion welcomes the recent reductions in roaming charges across Europe. Again, we have no difficulty with supporting that. Indeed, the Ulster Unionist Party welcomed the recent reductions in roaming charges through EU Regulation 717/2007 of the European Parliament and European Council. It was adopted in 2007 and amended in 2009. Our MEP, Jim Nicholson, voted in favour of those proposals, which introduced caps on roaming prices and placed an obligation on operators to provide customers with specific information on their roaming charges. The regulation was designed to improve transparency and affordability for all customers affected.

The third part of the motion welcomes the European Commission's plans to abolish roaming charges by 2015. The Europe 2020 strategy aims to ensure that Europe is turned into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy that delivers high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. One of the building blocks of that new strategy is the digital agenda for Europe, which defines a number of key performance targets for attaining a digital single market. The target for international mobile roaming services is that the difference between roaming and national tariffs will approach zero by 2015.

There is one caveat. I, along with other Members, attended a business breakfast this morning with the Assembly and Business Trust. We heard a briefing about the European Commission's seventh framework programme (FP7), which has a budget of more than €50 billion. We were told that from conception to decision, an application under FP7 takes one year. I question why it appears to take so long to do away with roaming charges. The year 2015 seems a long way out.

Finally, we come to the call for an immediate introduction of an all-Ireland telecommunications tariff to expedite the objective. Having listened to Mr Flanagan, my question with which I entered the House remains valid. I do not understand what the benefit would be to Northern Ireland. What happened to competition? What happened to the House having a duty to try to ensure that Northern Ireland has a competitive economic advantage? A pertinent issue cited in a report from the European Commission to the European Parliament on roaming on public mobile communications this year is:

> *"at this stage competitive market forces have not developed sufficiently and prices are still clustered at the level of the caps. This lack of competitive pressure is still felt both at wholesale and at retail levels, mostly due to the fact that structural problems such as barriers to market entry and high switching costs that prevail in the roaming market have remained unchallenged."*

That is why we have high roaming charges, and that is why the market forces are not coming to bear as they should.

Although I have outlined elements of the motion that my party would have no difficulty supporting, I oppose calls for the immediate introduction of an all-Ireland telecommunications tariff because I do not understand how the Northern Ireland economy would benefit.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Nesbitt: I do not support the motion, but I support the amendment.

Mr P Ramsey: I support the motion. I welcome the debate, and I welcome the amendment and the discussion around it. This issue has been in and out of the peripheral vision of Departments, North and South, for the past number of years, so I am glad that we have the opportunity to debate it in the House with the Minister present.

When household finances and, in turn, the wider economy are in a slump, we need to find innovative ways of creating growth and doing business more efficiently as well as being able to cut household bills and stick to budgets. To that end, there are particular circumstances on the border that I believe that Members do not understand. In my constituency, for example, the issue of mobile tariffs needs to be tackled by regulators and statutory bodies. It is a big issue for so many people. Similar to what was said by the proposer of the motion, Mr Flanagan, it is clear that Members who represent border constituencies understand, in a much stronger way, how the tariffs affect people's budgets.

Mr Wells: This honourable Member certainly understands that. When I drive from Kilkeel to Newry, I am regularly welcomed to the Irish Republic by various Irish mobile phone companies even though I have not set foot outside the United Kingdom. Does the Member have the same problem in Londonderry that I face in places such as Rostrevor and Warrenpoint, where people are on O2 UK while downstairs in their properties but move to O2 Ireland and pay roaming charges when they move upstairs? Does that not indicate how ridiculous the situation is that we face at the moment?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr P Ramsey: That is the essence of the motion and the discussions. You need an all-Ireland tariff. Why should O2 — *[Interruption]*. Sorry, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Thirty per cent of the people in the border regions are forced to pay roaming charges when receiving a call or a text or when making a call if they are on a contract or on pay-as-you-go with, for example, O2 UK. Therefore, it makes absolute sense to have an all-Ireland tariff for those companies and to force them down that route.

Mr Wells: There is a very simple solution. O2 Ireland and O2 UK are owned by the same company, so the company is charging one section for roaming to the other. If it were to eliminate that, O2 customers would not have to pay roaming charges. You do not need an all-Ireland tariff for that.

Mr P Ramsey: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will continue. I thank the Member for his intervention. He may be charged roaming charges on a limited basis, but it happens daily to thousands upon thousands of people in the border regions.

Co-operation between InterTradeIreland, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Republic's Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation led to the digital Ireland initiative working group being established in June 2003 to pursue:

> *"the fullest exploitation of the digital technologies by businesses across the island."*

That co-operation was needed to benefit not only the consumer but business. Ministers from both sides of the border who attended those meetings made clear reference at all times to the impact of mobile tariffs on the business community and to the issues that businesses that operate in the border communities face. High-level meetings that took place between the two respective regulators led to the ComReg/OFCOM joint working group in 2005, which raised some practical issues.

In particular, I make the point to Mr Wells that due to county, rather than geographical, boundaries in the North, mobile companies are unable to limit the scope of their signals on both sides of the border. If you try to get an O2 contract so that you can use a mobile phone in Donegal, O2 Ireland will tell you that it is a different company than O2 UK. Although the Member said that a Spanish company owns O2 overall, you will be told that it is two different companies. That shows that regulators are not taking the issue seriously, and I agree that there is a lot of greed and, at times, criminality and abuse in taking advantage of the situation.

Mr Byrne: Does the Member agree that people who live in close proximity to the border feel very alienated? They are asking the two Governments, North and South, to collaborate and to put pressure on the O2 companies to make sure that there is a single all-island tariff. Do not

worry about whether it is called an all-Ireland tariff; let us call it a single all-island tariff.

Mr P Ramsey: The Member represents a border constituency and comprehends fully the difficulties that affect not only the business community but consumers.

I welcome the efforts that the Minister has made in trying to tackle the issue. I have raised questions with her on the Floor of the House about the matter. The rural communities have been the worst affected by the level of provision of telecommunications that they have received, particularly broadband. I appeal for a united front on the matter. Although the European Union has a target to abolish roaming charges by 2015, it is imperative that we make a difference at a time when businesses and families in particular are working on streamlined, tighter budgets. It is such an important subject that I appeal to the Minister and anyone who is attending the North/South Ministerial Council meeting on Friday to raise it there. I support the motion.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak to the motion. Although I am unable to support it, I support the amendment. I will explain why I believe the motion does not achieve what it sets out or purports to do.

It is clear that the massive expansion in the number of people who use mobile devices has revolutionised the way in which we communicate. Other Members referred to that.

Given the dividends offered, it is vital that communication costs are affordable, to encourage business expansion and to ensure that the public do not incur unnecessary costs. Both those factors impact on our economic recovery. With that in mind, the announcement by the European Commission of a plan to end roaming charges by 2015 is welcome, although slow. It seems that the Commission is as tired of introducing cap after cap as we are of hearing about them.

3.30 pm

The new plan does, however, rely on increasing competition to drive down prices. As I understand it, consumers will be allowed to sign up to a separate operator for their roaming calls while keeping the same number and even the same SIM card. How that will work in practice has not been worked out. The prospect of having to deal with different bills from each operator and to jump through a series of administrative hoops has me concerned. In principle, however, it is a good idea. We should attempt to tackle the annoyance of roaming charges and we wait in expectation to see how the plan affects costs.

Anyone who has spent time, as I have, in and around the border region will know that you often get messages saying that you are now roaming even though you have not crossed the border. Other Members also referred to that. Inadvertent roaming usually occurs because there is a poor signal or no coverage at all from the home network. We should, therefore, encourage service providers to look at how signal strength and the technology of base stations can be improved.

For those visiting border regions, it may be an infrequent, minor problem, but it is a serious problem if you are a resident or a business there. Regular roaming between networks can add huge costs. Therefore, I understand and sympathise with the call by Sinn Féin to introduce an all-Ireland tariff. However, they have gone in the wrong direction. I have concerns about how an exclusively all-Ireland tariff would work in practice, because you cannot distinguish between a Northern Ireland mobile number and one from anywhere else on the UK mainland. Also, if huge changes were made to facilitate an all-Ireland tariff, could that possibly lead to an increase in costs for Northern Ireland residents calling the rest of the United Kingdom?

Surely a much more sensible plan would be to advocate what may be described as a pan-island tariff, which would encompass Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, given the practicalities and high level of interaction between all those countries. It would be much easier to instate a United Kingdom/Republic of Ireland tariff, which would effectively abolish roaming charges and introduce standard rates across these islands, than to merge the Republic of Ireland with Northern Ireland while cutting Northern Ireland off from the rest of the United Kingdom.

With regard to business, the value of UK exports to the Republic of Ireland is greater than the combined value of its exports to China, India, Brazil and Russia. The UK is the Republic's top trading partner. On a more personal level,

hundreds of years of migration between the islands have created a large diaspora of communities with family members scattered across the whole of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Therefore, it makes sense to harmonise tariffs, North and South, and east and west, to encourage business and other communication between all areas of the region.

I believe that the Minister recognises that, and although not a devolved matter, I believe that those are the areas that she will, and needs to, concentrate on. It would be of benefit to businesses across the island of Ireland, North and South, and I am sure that Sinn Féin would welcome that. I recognise the importance of affordable telecommunications to our economic recovery, and I welcome the European Commission's efforts. However, considering the great difficulties that the establishment of an exclusive all-Ireland tariff could bring, and believing that working towards a pan-island tariff would be much more beneficial, I cannot support the original motion but will be supporting the DUP amendment.

Mr Moutray: I support the DUP amendment. Telecommunications are evolving at an immense pace, with new, up-to-date IT products being launched on an almost daily basis. The world has, ultimately, become a much smaller and more accessible place, much to the benefit of business and the individual. Indeed, the use of telecommunications is now seen as a life vein running through many businesses. Therefore, roaming charges are something that this Assembly needs to continue to lobby the European Union and Whitehall on, given that it is not, as many have said, a devolved matter.

Additionally, we need to try to bring as much pressure to bear where possible on mobile phone network operators to abolish roaming charges in advance of 2015. They must take cognisance of the fact that in the past, they have charged extortionate prices to the detriment of the customer.

Everyone around the House has probably been hit with roaming charges at some point. It is all too easy to use our mobile devices in other jurisdictions only to later receive a hefty bill over and above what we thought it would it be. I have the utmost sympathy with folks living in many areas of Northern Ireland who, because of poor reception, are diverted to another provider that costs much more. Therefore, I, too, believe that it is time that roaming charges were abolished to aid business growth, grow our worldwide market accessibility and ensure that travellers and holidaymakers are not hit with extortionate prices.

Unfortunately, telecommunication operators are still able to charge outrageous margins, particularly on data downloads. Quite frankly, customers are getting a raw deal when it comes to cross-border usage, whether it is in the Republic of Ireland, France, Spain or wherever.

Like the proposers of the motion, I welcome the EU changes that have brought about a reduction in roaming charges and benefits to the consumer. However, we are all agreed that they do not go far enough, with network providers pricing at the higher end of the European maximum tariff rates. It is, however, very noticeable in this debate that, once again, some Members are using this issue as a political football and are politicising all-Ireland telecommunication tariffs. Is it not the case that it should happen throughout Europe so that customers benefit no matter where they are? We need this to work right across European divides to bring about real and tangible change.

As I already stated, this issue is not a devolved matter and, therefore, we are somewhat limited in what we, as a House, can do. However, I welcome Minister Foster's continued interest in this matter. The Minister has been active in endeavouring to intervene where possible and to encourage change with the providers, particularly with regard to improving 3G access. I welcome the fact that the 4G spectrum will soon be on the market, and we hope that we will have a regional target for mobile phone coverage that will not only help with coverage but with roaming charges.

The Minister has been active in publishing a telecoms action plan for Northern Ireland, which sets out clearly our objectives and goals for future development and investment. In that document, the Department acknowledges the importance of investment in improving the telecommunications infrastructure throughout Northern Ireland and of growing our competitiveness within the UK market place, which is renowned for its forward thinking, and within the telecoms marketplace. I also welcome the ongoing discussions with Ofcom that Minister Foster and her officials have had, particularly on the fact that many areas in Northern Ireland are sent to roaming because of bad coverage.

Quite simply, this is an issue right across Europe. It is not unique to this island, but we, as a House, must do everything within our powers to negotiate and lobby with Europe, Ofcom and mobile phone providers to bring about change. The telecommunications market is fast moving, and competitive advantage can be quickly eroded if regions fail to respond to an emerging demand for new services. We cannot be left behind on this issue. Our consumers cannot afford to be left behind, and the quicker roaming charges are dealt with and infrastructure improvements for coverage in Northern Ireland are made, the quicker our local businesses will be assisted in providing an enhanced service and reducing overheads. I support the amendment.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I welcome this important debate. Like Members who spoke previously, I welcome and commend the work of the Minister and her Department thus far on this issue, because it affects us as individuals, our constituents in border counties and businesses.

I am a bit concerned when some Members say that because we do not have jurisdiction over the matter or cannot do anything about it, we should not raise it. I, like others, have been involved in a lot of debates in this Assembly on issues that we do not have much say on. However, if something is of concern to our community and to our constituents, we bring it here as a matter of interest. Just because something does not come under the control of our Executive Ministers and Departments does not mean that it should not get to the Floor of this Assembly. This issue is relevant to people, businesses and our economy. I, for one, support any person who brings a motion of interest to the Assembly for discussion.

A lot of people have gone over many facts and figures, and I do not think that it is worth going over them again, except for a few. We have talked about roaming charges in the border counties, and I read some of the documentation that the research people provided for the debate; I thank them for that. The Minister gave her own example of travelling home to her constituency and the impact that that has.

I am trying to come up with sensible suggestions. I was going to get up to say that I support everything that Jim Wells said, and then sit down again, but I did not want to get Jim into trouble. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Ramsey: Let me finish this point; then I will give way. In fairness, I understand what you said. It is a sensible solution to a problem. I know where you are coming from, and I support what you are saying. I will give way. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wells: Just in case it could ever be misconstrued that I support any form of all-Ireland anything, I will explain. O2 Ireland and O2 UK are owned by the same Spanish holding company; we accept that. Therefore, there is no reason for them to charge roaming charges for taking a call from a different branch of the same company. That does not require an all-Ireland telecoms solution; that just requires the company to stop fleecing its customers, be it O2 Ireland or O2 UK. It is not rocket science; it is simply a way of generating profits and money for that company.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat. I agree with you totally, because if the Minister is in one part of her house, she is charged O2 prices, but if she goes into another part of her house, she is charged on another network. I am not saying that you have a big house, Minister. *[Laughter.]* I am not for one minute suggesting that.

I agree with what you are saying; there seems to be a sensible solution to this major problem, but how do we get to it? It is to ensure that there is one tariff. Whatever way you want to set it up, whether it involves one company or two companies, there has to be one tariff. We have gone into the amount of people affected by this, especially around the border counties. Figures suggest that it impacts on around 105,000 people living in and around the border counties. We have talked about the impact that it has on businesses, so there is an economic need for this to be sorted.

To date, I support and welcome the work that the Minister has done, because work has been done. We talk about what Ofcom can and cannot do and about the EU, the work that it has done and how it will ensure that roaming charges will be abolished by 2015. That has to be welcomed. We need to live in the real world. However, is there anything that we can

do between now and 2015 to put pressure on the telecommunications companies, through the Assembly, the Oireachtas or our involvement with our MEPs? Mike Nesbitt, who is not in the Chamber, raised the point that we can use them to put pressure on the Commission, so that at least between now and then, we are working —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Ramsey: OK.

Mr Dickson: Does the Member agree that in addition to the issue concerning residents living on the border, the bigger and better lobby would be the business lobby in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, as it depends on mobile phones for doing its business between the two jurisdictions? There are far more businesses in the United Kingdom that need to make phone calls to the Republic of Ireland than anyone living in the border areas.

Ms S Ramsey: Absolutely. In the Good Friday Agreement, there is an onus for us not only to work North/South, but also to work east-west. We want to have a common sense approach that will have an impact on people's lives, and I have no difficulty with that.

A Member: Why did you bring the motion?

Ms S Ramsey: What we are trying to do is move forward, so —

Mr McLaughlin: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: You are not going to get time to answer.

Ms S Ramsey: I will write to the Minister. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McLaughlin: If we are discussing roaming charges, we also have to consider something that has already been referred to — I do not need to rehearse it — which is what the Commission is doing and what it intends to do. It has recognised the problem. The difficulty is that from Westminster's perspective, England, Scotland and Wales do not have a roaming problem. We have it here on the island of Ireland and what we are exploring is what we can do between now and 2015.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr McLaughlin: Does the Member agree that that is what we should address?

Ms S Ramsey: I agree totally. I know that my time is up. Will the Minister raise the issue at the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council so that we can see what we can do between now and 2015?

3.45 pm

Mrs McKevitt: I support the motion and welcome the opportunity to speak on it, particularly as so many of my constituents in South Down, which borders the shores of County Louth, are so badly affected by inadvertent roaming charges.

Like many mobile telephone users in border areas, I have experienced the unexpected excessive charges each month. You can manually switch off roaming but only if you are prepared not to receive what might be an urgent call from a family member, constituent or, indeed, the emergency services. You find yourself asking what the point of having a mobile phone is when you have to switch if off to save on exorbitant charges. It should also be noted, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, that most phones that handle data prevent you from manually switching off roaming.

I have called many people in the Warrenpoint/Rostrevor area on their mobile phones only to be asked whether they can call me back on the landline or send me a text message. I am currently roaming on the Irish network. That gives me an idea of the number of mobile users who experience the high cost of international roaming without ever leaving home.

If the immediate introduction of an all-Ireland telecommunications tariff can be expedited, as the motion proposes, it will support the European Commission's plans either to abolish roaming charges or to reduce them to as close to zero as possible, as well as righting a great injustice to border users. The key phrase in the motion is "the immediate introduction". The Assembly should do all in its power to ensure that the goal of minimising or eradicating cross-border roaming charges in all of Ireland, as set by the Ofcom/ComReg joint working group in 2005, is implemented now.

The idea that a transmitter on a hilltop overlooking County Down and County Louth can charge two different rates, according to where you live, is fundamentally wrong and discriminatory. It is like a petrol pump in Dundalk charging one price to locals and

another to motorists crossing the border, or two prices being charged on a toll road: one to cars registered in the South and a hugely inflated price to cars registered in the North.

The aforementioned report states that 700,000 mobile customers in the North could benefit from an all-Ireland tariff that reduces roaming charges, so it is understandable that the mobile network operators are reluctant to move with any speed to implement such a tariff. However, they must be encouraged to act immediately. If they do not, legislation should be introduced to remove the unwarranted roaming charges.

I want to make a point before I finish, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. My mind might have been roaming in the Chamber when Mr Flanagan spoke earlier, but I got the impression that he understood that the SDLP had tabled an amendment. We most certainly did not.

Mr Elliott: At this stage of the debate, I suppose that almost everything has been said about roaming charges. I note that one issue is the amount of profit made by some mobile phone companies. Recent statistics show that in 2009, Vodafone, O2, Orange and T-Mobile made a profit from the charges. Together, they rake in about £2 million a day or £750 million a year. In these austere and economically difficult times, it is unfortunate that some of that cannot be passed back to the consumer.

I live in broadly the same border area as the Minister. She commented during a previous Question Time that she was on something that she should not be on — I wondered then what mobile phone company she was with.

People enter roaming areas very quickly, even when 10, 12 or 15 miles from the border. Given those distances, I cannot understand how we can be charged a totally different and highly inflated rate for outgoing, and even incoming, calls.

Some of the issues go back a number of years, when some politicians objected to the erection of phone masts, which would have resolved some of the problems in border areas. I remember Sinn Féin actively opposing mobile phone masts, which would have resolved some of the transmitting problems, in the border areas of Fermanagh, and I would be very surprised if the situation was not similar in other areas. Thankfully, that appears to have diminished now, but if the erection of a lot of those mobile phone masts had been permitted at the time, instead of the widespread opposition to them, particularly from Sinn Féin Members, we might have fewer roaming charges in Northern Ireland now.

Mr Flanagan: Does the Member agree that the issue of mobile phone masts and coverage in black spots may be a problem with regard to inadvertent roaming, but the motion refers to roaming when one actually crosses the border? Therefore, no amount of mobile phone masts in rural Fermanagh would address that issue.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for that point. However, the point that I am trying to make is that we are roaming even though we are not in the Republic of Ireland. I am sure that the Member will accept that point. There are black spots that incur roaming charges, which add significantly to the costs to the business community and private users every month.

I will be interested to hear whether there is any resolution to the issue because it has been talked about for some time. Phone companies keep telling us that they are trying to reduce roaming charges and that they are going to bring them down, but every time I get my phone bill and there are roaming charges on it, they do not appear to have come down very significantly. In fact, they almost appear to have gone up in price. The fact is that we need a resolution.

The second issue relates to the mobile internet because roaming charges for that are also significant. If you try to use a dongle from any of the main mobile phone companies in any country outside the United Kingdom, the roaming charges are significant. In fact, I have been advised by those companies not to use them because the charges are so high. They have suggested that I find another method of logging on to the internet when I am abroad because the charges are much too high. I am keen to hear what resolution there is to that.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I welcome the debate. It has been good and many points have been made in relation to the issue. As Mr Nesbitt said, there are four elements to the motion. First, there is the importance of access to affordable telecommunications services for economic recovery. Secondly, there is the reduction in charges for mobile roaming, which apply right across Europe, not just between Northern

Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. I think that Mr McLaughlin said that this problem does not happen in England, Scotland and Wales, but people in south-east England also have a problem with roaming because they go onto a French network on some occasions. Therefore, it happens in south-east England as well. Thirdly, there is the proposal that we welcome the abolition of the roaming charge by 2015. Lastly, the motion calls for an all-Ireland tariff to be introduced to expedite that objective.

The importance of the telecommunications sector has long been recognised by the Executive, and there were telecommunications objectives in the last Programme for Government, which has seen an unprecedented amount of government funding being used to stimulate improvements in telecommunications infrastructure right across Northern Ireland. Building on that and recognising the pace of change in that market, my Department recently consulted on and published a telecommunications action plan, which was mentioned by some Members, under which it has set out its priorities for further investment over the period 2011-15.

The motion highlights the importance of affordable telecommunications costs. Bearing in mind that what is affordable to one business may not necessarily be viewed as being affordable to others, we have looked at reports from a variety of sources to ascertain whether, in the round, our telecommunications costs are affordable. In particular, the European Commission and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have undertaken a couple of international surveys that focus on telecommunications costs. The survey from OECD notes that the measurement of communication prices is inherently complex. Obviously, that is the case.

One only has to look at the range of offers available, whether for fixed-line services, broadband services, mobile, TV or any combination of those to see that that is absolutely the case. That said, OECD produces a regular report on international telecoms pricing. Its most recent publication for 2011, which compared prices for some 25 countries, including the UK and the Republic of Ireland, suggests that although fixed-line costs in the UK are slightly higher for businesses compared to ROI, the UK costs for mobile services for business are some of the cheapest in the world. That takes out the roaming charges and relates only to the domestic mobile cost.

The Commission has also been studying costs, and its most recent report into the matter indicates that prices for mobile services continue to fall. That report seems to indicate plenty of choice for consumers, with over 30 companies offering mobile services in the UK. Furthermore, Ofcom, our telecommunications regulator, reports in its most recent communications market report for 2010 that the average monthly revenue for a business line for mobile subscribers continues to fall in nominal terms to £25·51, yet overall mobile revenues have increased compared with 2009, which suggests that businesses are using mobile services more now that costs are coming down. It is also important to note that as Northern Ireland is part of the wider UK marketplace, business and residential consumers benefit from being part of one of the most competitive telecoms marketplaces in Europe.

As Minister with responsibility for the economy, I particularly welcome speaking about the next two points in the motion. Anything that reduces costs for businesses is to be welcomed, especially if we are to further develop our business links and trade with Europe. However, in the slightly longer term, I wonder whether further cost reduction will happen even more rapidly than required in the European Commission's targets due to the operation of market forces. A lot of people have talked about 2015 and the need to do something before then. I wholeheartedly agree with that. Sometimes, market forces move more quickly than the European Commission. Sue Ramsey asked a very meaningful question about what we can do now, and I want to address that in my final remarks.

Increasingly, we have devices that can use Wi-Fi hot spots, internet phones and Skype technology. Already, companies such as Three and O2 allow for free internet calls. Many operators also provide free calls to users on the same network. It would not surprise me if some of our best entrepreneurs were already exploiting those technologies to make free calls across Europe and to reduce their overheads, which would be welcomed by everybody in the Chamber. That is why it is notable that my Department's telecommunications action plan is seeking to improve mobile voice and data services across Northern Ireland. I firmly believe

that that is one of the main areas on which we should focus our efforts going forward.

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

Members referred to the fact that I have had ongoing communication with Ofcom on these issues. However, there is more that we can do. Our efforts should be focused more on trying to reduce the barriers for investment in telecoms infrastructure, whether that is streamlining the planning processes, incentivising investments, establishing suitable access to infrastructure for service providers or, as many Members said, rejecting taxation proposals for masts. Indeed, attacks have taken place, and we must recognise that that was a disincentive to companies in the past, particularly with regard to masts in border areas. It is clear that the demand for mobile services is increasing. Therefore, we should be planning ahead so that adequate infrastructure is in place to allow our businesses and entrepreneurs to fully exploit that technology and the potential productivity and efficiency gains that it offers.

Members have been asking whether more steps can be taken to improve mobile coverage in certain areas. Some of you have noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer recently announced a fund aimed at improving mobile coverage. My officials are already in discussions with their Whitehall counterparts on how we might access the fund and have begun a round of discussions with the mobile phone companies to gain a better understanding of their requirements and some of the constraints that they face in Northern Ireland.

I also meet NIO Minister Hugo Swire quarterly to discuss this issue and other telecommunication and economic matters. Furthermore, I hope that our Members of Parliament will highlight Northern Ireland's case in relation to this issue at Westminster. I want to record my gratitude to Ian Paisley Jnr, who offered his assistance in that regard, and I hope that other Members of Parliament will do the same.

4.00 pm

Mr Humphrey: Not all of them will.

Mrs Foster: Sorry?

Mr Humphrey: Not all of them will.

Mrs Foster: I am sure that all of them will.

I will answer Ms Ramsey's question. We can, in a meaningful way, engage with Whitehall and Westminster to see if there is something that we can do ahead of the 2015 target. I intend to discuss that with Hugo Swire in the near future. He has been a good advocate for us on these matters.

I must say to Ms Ramsey that it was not in my house that I got the different roaming charges; it was just down the road. I was hoping that people would not remember the Brookeborough incident, when I said that I was on something that I should not have been on: obviously, everybody did.

A solution to the problem is available to home users, and it is called femtocell. I am happy to send the details of that system to Members, if it would be of interest to their constituents.

Mr Flanagan: For clarification, the Minister may be aware that the use of femtocell systems is approved only by Vodafone here and not by any of the other networks.

Mrs Foster: I was just coming to that — I am sorry, I thought that someone else wanted to speak. We have funded trials of the technology in Ballintoy and, as the Member probably knows, in Ballinamallard. That technology is promoted by Vodafone. I mention it because some people will have that difficulty, and I want to make it known that there is a solution. However, I accept that it is only promoted by one mobile provider.

The last part of the motion deals with the issue of expediting an all-Ireland tariff. However, as has been referenced, the Assembly has little direct control over that, and I remind the Assembly that our powers to intervene are non-existent, because telecommunications is not a transferred matter. We need to work on this with our Westminster colleagues, and I will continue to push them on the issue. It is an issue not only in border areas but across Northern Ireland. Indeed, for some bizarre reason, you move to a different network when you are on the Giant's Causeway.

Members will know that this is not the first time that this issue has been raised with me. In reply to an Assembly question in September, I referred to the European Commission's plans for a reduction in roaming charges in 2015, and I understand that proposals will come forward for consultation in the near future. However, I share Mr Nesbitt's concern that that is four years

away. There is something more that we can do to push the issue forward, and we should very much consider using our Members of Parliament and our MEPs.

Two organisations raised issues during the consultation process on the telecommunications action plan for Northern Ireland 2011-2015. One response suggested that we should establish a buffer zone in border areas in which roaming charges were not permitted, but it was indicated that we have no power or mandate to establish that buffer zone. Another response — I am telling the House this for the sake of the transparency and clarity of that action plan — complained of savage roaming charges, and we pointed out that work was being taken forward by regulators across Europe to deal with the issue.

The call for the immediate introduction of an all-Ireland telecommunications tariff to expedite the European Commission's objective is something that, frankly, the Assembly has no power over. The issue of roaming charges is one that we should and will continue to deal with through the Westminster Government. Instead of raising the issue in a ritualistic way at meetings of the NSMC, where it will not make any difference, we would be much better dealing with our Westminster colleagues to highlight the impact that the issue has across the Northern Ireland economy. That is what I intend to do over the next few weeks. I thank Members for their contributions, and I look forward to the closing speeches. Thank you very much.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive response to the debate. If Members bear with me, I will endeavour to summarise some of the issues that were raised.

Paul Flanagan raised a number of issues. He made it clear that it was a border issue.

Ms S Ramsey: You are roaming. That is Phil.

Mr Dunne: Pardon?

Ms S Ramsey: You are roaming. That is Phil.

Mr Dunne: Sorry, Phil Flanagan. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will Members make all their remarks through the Chair?

Mr Dunne: Sorry, Phil.

Mr Flanagan: You were close.

Mr Dunne: Yes, very close. He said that roaming charges were very much a problem in border counties and reckoned that it placed a great financial burden on people living there. He talked about bolt-ons to reduce costs. However, the loopholes in those were their extra cost to the customer. He acknowledged the need to do away with roaming because of the extra rates. He said, as he would, that he wanted a commitment from Dublin, and he talked about the profiteering going on along the border.

Robin Newton is not here, but he said that there was no legislation to regulate the cost of telephone operators, and that is a big problem. He also said that the Minister had been involved in discussions with Ofcom and that telecommunications were not a devolved matter.

Mike Nesbitt raised various issues. He asked why it took so long in the run-up to 2015 before this question could be addressed. He said that an all-Ireland tariff would reduce competitive pressure and its introduction would be of no real benefit to the Northern Ireland economy.

Pat Ramsey also said that roaming charges were a big issue in border constituencies. He felt that something needed to be done. He was concerned about domestic and business charges. He said that, when questioned about this issue, phone companies said that they operated as separate companies in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

For this to work, Stewart Dickson said that an increase in competition would be relied on — different operators for normal calls and roaming services.

Stephen Moutray made the very good point that customers get a raw deal, not just across the border but across Europe. He said that the charges did not affect just those in the Republic of Ireland but those in Spain, France and right across Europe.

Sue Ramsey made a very good point: she supported Jim Wells in all that he said, so we are making progress. She went on to say that we needed to put more pressure on telecommunications providers.

Karen McKevitt made the point that customers had to switch off their phone because they could not afford the excessive charges. Obviously, that is not satisfactory.

Tom Elliott said that mobile phone companies made a profit of £2 million a day. Was it £2 million? That is £750 million a year in excessive costs at the expense of users.

Internet charges were also an issue. The Minister recognised that they affected not just those in Northern Ireland or the Republic but those in south-east England. She said that she is doing what she can to use her influence to reduce the cost before 2015. She recognises and fully supports the increased use of phone systems, and she made the point that it is important that we try to improve the infrastructure to help those in business. The Minister assured us that she is doing everything that she can to help. She is engaging with Whitehall and Westminster. She mentioned meeting Hugo Swire, and she is endeavouring to use all her influence to get this matter resolved as soon as possible.

I thank —

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

Mr Dunne: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. I support the amendment. No doubt, the future is bright; the future is Orange. *[Laughter.]*

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The end of the debate has just added to the confusion that there has been the whole way through it. We put forward a simple motion to put pressure on phone companies in order to make a difference. Many people across the island of Ireland, including the North, where we are elected representatives, are affected day and daily by roaming charges, and yet we cannot agree on how to deal with the issue. As Phil said when proposing the motion, we will not have a hissy fit about the amendment or make a big deal of it; we will work our way through it instead.

All the major phone companies will be laughing at today's debate, because they have got away scot-free. That is the reality of the debate. We cannot get agreement on whether this is an all-Ireland issue, an east-west issue, a pan-European issue or a pan-islands issue, which was mentioned in the debate. I do not care what it is, as long as we get a fair deal for the people we represent. Phone companies make a complete and utter fortune and will continue to do so over the next four years until 2015 and possibly thereafter. If we cannot get agreement on the issue, the phone companies will be laughing, because they will be able to charge customers whatever they want. In fact, after listening to the debate, I would not be surprised if they increased their charges once again. We have not been able to show solidarity. So, roaming charges it is, I think, and that is a shame.

When Phil Flanagan moved the motion and opened the debate, he started off by stating clearly why everybody in the House should support the motion. One of the reasons was that phone companies make millions from roaming charges. Who pays that money to the phone companies? It is our constituents and the other people on the island of Ireland. He also said that Ofcom stated clearly that it hopes that roaming charges will be abolished by 2015. However, 2015 is four years away, and people will have to pay that additional money until then.

I feel for businesspeople. It is difficult to make a profit in this day and age, and their profit margins are squeezed day and daily. We have not represented them today. If we stand with them, we can make a difference. We have not done so today; far from it. You can talk about bolt-ons, add-ons or whatever, but phone companies are only interested in themselves and in how much money they can make.

In moving the amendment, Robin Newton said that the motion is political: of course it is. This is a political institution, and every motion tabled here is political. You need to face reality, Robin: the motion is political, and you are in a political institution, although sometimes you might not act like it. Those are some of the serious issues that affect us all.

Robin deviated a bit from the debate by talking about the position of Sinn Féin councillors on the issue of phone masts. I lobbied and voted against phone masts outside primary schools, nursery schools, old people's homes and people's houses. That is a big issue, and I will continue to raise it, because it is not clear whether such masts emit radiation or cause contamination.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Member for giving way. It is one thing to protest and lobby against phone masts in certain areas. However, it is quite another for people to pull down phone masts in rural areas such as Ballygawley, which is what happened some years ago. Does the Member agree that that is not acceptable? To

this very day, there is no mobile connection between Dungannon and Ballygawley along the main A4 road.

4.15 pm

Mr P Maskey: I thank the Member for that. Given Mr Newton's earlier comments, I intend to raise this issue with the Principal Deputy Speaker, who was in the Chair at the time. I ask the Speaker's Office to read Hansard. Mr Newton said that Sinn Féin had some responsibility for doing damage to phone masts. If the Member has that information, he should bring it forward.

Mr Moutray: Answer the question.

Mr P Maskey: Should property be damaged? No, it should not. However, I am not going to stand here to be accused by other Members. That is why I am asking the Speaker's Office to take a serious note of the issue. If Robin Newton is saying that Sinn Féin may be responsible for damaging phone masts, I want that to be checked out. I want the issue to be taken on board.

Unfortunately, Mike Nesbitt has left the Chamber. He said that the motion had no links to the Assembly. We have tried to make the motion Assembly-relevant by putting as much pressure as possible on those who are responsible. The big issue for me is that we do not have the accountability mechanisms to do that.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr P Maskey: Let me finish my point, and then I will give way. I ask the Minister to organise meetings with the telecommunications companies, which is where the pressure needs to be applied. After listening to the concerns of everyone in the Chamber, the Minister and her Executive colleagues should meet to ensure that that pressure is applied and those companies do the right thing.

Mr Ross: The Member is probably better placed than most in the House to make his argument in the place where it actually matters. He is elected to the House of Commons at Westminster, which is where authority on the issue rests. If he took his position in the House of Commons, he could make those arguments there.

Mr P Maskey: That point proves why I am an abstentionist. Assembly Members have been sitting in that Chamber for many years and have done absolutely nothing about the matter. That shows your point. *[Interruption.]* Do you want to come back in?

Mr Deputy Speaker: All remarks should be made through the Chair, please.

Mr P Maskey: The debate is relevant because pressure must be put on the telecommunications companies. Figures released today show that they are making absolute millions while we are all hindered by their costs.

Sue Ramsey said that there was a sensible solution — one tariff — whether that tariff applies across the island of Ireland or extends to England, Scotland and Wales. Mitchel McLaughlin said that it is not a big issue in England, Scotland and Wales, which have only one network. The Minister pointed out that there can be roaming charges between the south-east of England and France, which we may need to examine in a European context.

We should send a clear message from the Chamber today that we want fair charges for everyone. Nobody should be hindered by this matter. Businesses working on the island of Ireland should not have increased charges every year. Karen McKevitt spoke about people in homes being affected and hit by roaming charges whether they live in the North or the South. She spoke about discrimination against mobile phone users. That is the point of the debate, which we highlighted well. There is discrimination against mobile phone users, who are being charged extraordinary and extortionate rates by phone companies. Only the phone companies are getting richer, and we have done absolutely nothing about it today.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes the importance of affordable telecommunication costs to achieving economic recovery; welcomes the recent reductions in roaming charges across Europe; further welcomes the European Commission's plans to abolish roaming charges by 2015; and calls on the mobile network operators to abolish roaming charges in advance of 2015; and further notes that regulation of telecommunications on a UK-wide basis is key to a competitive Northern Ireland marketplace.*

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond and, on this occasion, all other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr A Maginness: Of all the problems that exist in North Belfast — we have many problems, Mr Deputy Speaker —housing is probably the most critical. Without a roof over your head and a place to call home, your life is devalued, your self-worth is diminished and your dignity undermined. That applies not just to individuals but, more importantly, to their families.

We have a chronic housing shortage in North Belfast. That was recognised as long ago as October 2000, when the north Belfast housing strategy was produced to tackle the area's endemic housing problems. In preparing the strategy, the Housing Executive analysed the state of housing and concluded that there was differential need between the Catholic community and the Protestant community in the area. According to the strategy, the Catholic community had much greater need for newbuild housing than the Protestant community. Although it recognised that the Protestant community had very serious housing needs, it also recognised that both communities in North Belfast had different levels and types of housing need. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive recognised the need for newbuilds in Catholic areas and the need, to a lesser degree, for newbuilds in Protestant areas. However, there was a need to raise housing standards in Protestant areas in particular.

A two-pronged approach was employed to address the differential housing need in North Belfast. That remains the Housing Executive's basic approach a decade after the launch of the 2000 housing strategy. The basic problem of housing shortage and increased demand remains. Actual demand for social housing in 2011 exceeds what was predicted in 2000. Housing demand far outstrips supply. Put simply, more houses are needed than was originally anticipated in 2000.

That is not to say that the Housing Executive has not done a good job over the past decade: it has. Given the difficulty in procuring land and building sites, it has performed well. In total, 1,034 units were built under the housing newbuild programme between April 2006 and March 2011. The reality is, however, that there is still a very real and pressing housing need in North Belfast. The latest figures for March 2011 indicate that 2,427 applicants are on the waiting list. Of those, 1,335 are in housing stress, and, of those, 422 are families and 675 are single people. The problem with single people is very serious indeed. It is due to lifestyle choices and marriage and relationship break-ups and so forth. Of the families, 350 are Catholic, and approximately 80% of those who are in housing stress are Catholic.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has tried to complete roughly 250 homes each year. In 2010-11, it achieved 254 completions. The Housing Executive has projected housing need as 1,262 units over the next five years, which is approximately 250 a year with an emphasis on family homes. Girdwood, which consists of 20 acres, would make a significant contribution to the achievement of that target this year and beyond.

Accepting the argument that the housing problem was chronic and, therefore, required a significant boost through newbuild housing and given the serious shortage of building land in North Belfast, the previous Minister for Social Development, Alex Attwood, quite properly approved the building of 200 houses at Girdwood, appointed Apex Housing, the north-west housing association, to develop the scheme, provided the necessary budget cover and teed up the scheme for formal planning processes. By now, that planning process should have been largely completed and the way should have been open for building in 2012. In doing so, he saw the pressing need to address substantially the housing shortage in North Belfast by way of a significant newbuild programme. However, this year, the target has been seriously reduced to 172 units, which are spread across 14 different schemes in North Belfast. Frankly, there is simply no alternative to Girdwood: it is the banker for North Belfast housing.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree that the timing of the former Minister's announcement of

200 houses in North Belfast at Girdwood was purely to do with the election, was an SDLP attempt to outmanoeuvre Sinn Féin in the run-up to the election and was a gross insult to the community in lower Oldpark, where many residents live in conditions that are akin to those during the blitz in 1941?

Mr A Maginness: You may not be surprised to hear that I do not accept that. In fact, the Minister made a considered, meritorious decision and attempted to address the chronic housing shortage in North Belfast. It was right and proper for the Minister to make such a decision on foot of a previous preparatory decision by Minister Margaret Ritchie, and it was right and proper that follow-up should take place.

You refer to conditions in lower Oldpark. Of course those conditions must be addressed, and, indeed, the Minister, Alex Attwood, attempted to address them in part, as he did in other parts of North Belfast.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member again. The Minister's attempt to address, as the Member put it, the appalling housing conditions in lower Oldpark was rejected by the local community. When the Minister turned up to launch the document, the community would not even be in the photograph. The Minister was well aware before he left office of the feelings, concerns and frustrations of the people in lower Oldpark, and the proposals never had the endorsement of that community because they were an insult to the people there.

Mr A Maginness: To some extent, you are accusing the Minister of acting in a neglectful fashion and, perhaps, of deliberately ignoring the needs of people in lower Oldpark. If the Minister had been so minded, why did he go to lower Oldpark and engage with the community there? You may be right when you say that the community was not satisfied with what was on offer, but you must give credit to a Minister for going to a community, engaging with it and attempting to address the housing problems there. So your observations are quite unfair, and it is quite wrong to suggest that he in some way neglected or ignored the interests of that community. The fact is that the Minister took the time and made the effort to engage with that community.

4.30 pm

Having outlined the objectively established extensive housing need in North Belfast and the wonderful opportunity that Girdwood provides for housing development, it is very difficult to understand the present Minister's decision to drop Girdwood from the social housing development programme for this year. There does not appear to be a rational explanation.

Here is land owned by DSD. Therefore, it does not cost it or the Housing Executive a penny to purchase, as it is in DSD's ownership. Here is a brownfield site that is completely clear, uncontaminated and free to be built upon at any time. Indeed, it has been in that condition for quite some time. Certainly, if planning permission were granted, the housing association would be in a position to commence building immediately, because there is no need for clearance or any further preparatory work to be carried out. Yet the Minister drops this important housing scheme from the housing development programme for this year without rational explanation. Clearly, the Housing Executive is disappointed with the Minister's decision to drop from the programme, without explanation, the building of 200 houses at Girdwood. I understand that the Housing Executive has written to the Minister asking him to explain the deletion of this scheme from the housing development programme but, to date, no reply has been received.

It has been limply put forward by the DUP that no housing development should take place at Girdwood until other developments at the site are agreed. I strongly disagree. Housing is an overriding need of such proportions that it requires to be satisfied as soon as is practicable. The development of the Mater Hospital, St Malachy's College and a business park can all be accommodated in due course in the same way that the community hub facility sponsored by Belfast City Council can be accommodated. I agree with those developments; they should take place, but they should not be an excuse to exclude or delay housing. Lack of consensus around those issues should not be used as a veto.

What is extremely disturbing is that of all the housing schemes in Northern Ireland, this was the only one removed from the programme by the Minister and without explanation. Therefore, the question is: why did the Minister unilaterally exclude this scheme, above all others, from the programme?

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I am running out of time. I am sorry. I have given way twice. Thank you.

Many suspect that his decision is based on political prejudice. I hope it is not. However, on the face of it, the Minister's decision is perverse. What he has done is to pervert the noble aim of the north Belfast housing strategy, which is to satisfy the pressing housing demand in North Belfast. What I ask today is for the Minister to review what I regard as a perverse decision and to give hope to hundreds of families and people who are looking for homes to renew and to improve their lives. Even at this late stage, the Minister could redeem the situation by reviewing his decision so that Girdwood can be reintroduced into the housing programme at the earliest stage.

I very much hope that the Minister will reflect on what I have said and change his mind. I believe that Girdwood offers a golden opportunity for the whole community, particularly in satisfying housing need, and I hope that the Minister can contribute to that by expediting housing development at Girdwood.

Mr Humphrey: When the Girdwood advisory panel met, the following mission statement was agreed:

> *"To create a regeneration project of international significance which brings maximum economic, social and environmental benefits to the local and wider community and in doing so creates a vibrant, inclusive and diverse environment which attracts present and future generations of people to live, work and visit."*

The Girdwood site provides a great opportunity for North Belfast and the wider city, and that ripples out into Northern Ireland. It is a site that should be developed as a shared site, as set out in the principles of the Dunlop/Toner report of 2002 on delivering a shared space for North Belfast.

Mr A Maginness: I agree with the Member that it should be a shared site. The developments at St Malachy's, the community hub, the Mater Hospital and the business park are all opportunities for the whole community to share. I do not rule out shared housing on that site — for both the Catholic and Protestant communities — so I agree with what you are saying, but that does not exclude the commencement of a housing development on the site now.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Democratic Unionist Party is absolutely determined to deliver a shared space in that area. The first piece of the jigsaw is the agreement by the Special EU Programmes Body to take forward the next phase of Belfast City Council's hub concept. I listened to the Member, and I am grateful to him for giving way on two occasions, but he is fundamentally wrong about housing. It is the one issue that was not agreed by the advisory panel and the parties. The Member accepts that.

Officials at every public meeting that I attended, whether in lower Oldpark or lower Shankill, gave assurances to those communities — it may well have been the same in Cliftonville, and so on, on the nationalist side — that no decision would be made without those communities being consulted. It was, therefore, a source of great regret that during the previous SDLP leadership election, Minister Ritchie announced in the House that 200 houses would be built, without there having been any consultation with the local community. Then, earlier this year, as part of the election, Minister Attwood announced the building of 200 houses, in what I think was a tactical move to outmanoeuvre Sinn Féin for the nationalist vote. Those are very disappointing and retrograde steps by the SDLP. That site, which was to be taken forward on an agreed basis for a shared future and a shared space, is unfortunately being used for party political reasons.

The lower Oldpark community remains concerned, fearful and anxious about the development of Girdwood. I frequently meet people in the lower Oldpark community, and we will not let that community down. Unfortunately, both SDLP Ministers for Social Development jettisoned the principles that were agreed.

If we develop the site, there must be buy-in from all communities that abut the site. The lower Oldpark struggles with the impact of intense and deepening poverty, underinvestment by the Housing Executive, sectarian violence and sectarian attacks. At a recent public meeting that I attended, a member of that community asked me, "Are we to be the new Torrens?" It is a challenge for the Department for Social Development and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ensure that communities in lower Oldpark, lower Shankill and Cliftonville be

facilitated in this concept. We must always consult widely with those communities and take their views on board.

I recently brought two members of the SDLP from Belfast City Council to the lower Oldpark area to see it at first hand. It resembles something from the Blitz in 1941. The way in which that area has sat for so long, ignored and neglected, is appalling.

The previous Minister's plan for the area simply did not have buy-in and would not have regenerated the area. In fact, it was an insult to that community. The community could not endorse the proposals and so set about establishing its own action group, which has put forward a plan that has been endorsed by that community.

I will return to the issue of Girdwood. The DUP is determined to endorse the plan for the lower Oldpark. That is why we attended a recent community event and met local people from both sides of the community to listen to their concerns and fears. We will work to see the plan realised. To that end, we have met representatives of local schools, officials from the Mater Hospital, the Roman Catholic bishop Noël Treanor, the Lower Oldpark Community Association and the Greater Shankill Partnership Board.

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

Mr Humphrey: We have met St Patrick's and St Joseph's Housing Committee and the immediate past moderator of the Presbyterian Church. We have met the Ulster Unionist Party, Sinn Féin and the SDLP.

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

Mr Humphrey: We are determined to see a shared future on a shared site that benefits the entire community in North Belfast, not just one community.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Alban Maginness for securing this important debate. Most of us here represent North Belfast, but we are not here for an argument, even though, clearly, there are disagreements. The two Members who spoke at the beginning talked about the community — perhaps, at times, about different sections of the community — but all this is about a very disadvantaged area that needs assistance. Housing is at the core, whether that be the need for newbuild in the nationalist area, as Alban Maginness pointed out, or, as the Member opposite described, upgrading and renovation of housing in the lower Oldpark.

We all agree that it is a disadvantaged area. Some wards are the most deprived not only in the North of Ireland but in Europe. We are in the middle of an economic downturn, and we have a site that has been lying empty for years. From my time as a junior Minister, I recall that it is a 26-acre site, which included the jail. In fact, the jail site has been substantially renovated for tourism, which will help to create jobs in North Belfast in the near future. I believe that it is opening again in January 2012. We submitted a successful application for a composite project to the SEUPB. It is important to say that it was a composite project — that has already been pointed out — by all the parties on Belfast City Council. The community hub, which is at the centre of that project, needs to be acceptable and, I think, is acceptable to everyone.

However, there are issues that we cannot ignore. Before I got up to speak, William Humphrey read out the mission statement drawn up by the first advisory panel. Its aim was to create a regeneration project for the wider community that:

> *"creates a vibrant, inclusive and diverse environment which attracts present and future generations of people to live, work and visit."*

I emphasise the word "live". That mission statement was agreed by all the parties. The issue is how to deal with living in such an environment. It is about local practice and international best practice on a site of such importance for regeneration, which goes beyond North Belfast. On any major regeneration site, however, the people living there are crucial. That is accepted right across the board.

From the start, the Housing Executive aimed to build 200 housing units. Let us be honest, 200 units will not deal with the severe and crucial lack of housing in North Belfast but it certainly would be a way of moving the whole process forward. As Alban Maginness pointed out, there are not that many sites on which we can do that.

4.45 pm

It is very important to say that I understand what I think is described as the nervousness around the lower Oldpark and all of that. No person — and, in particular, no elected

representative — in North Belfast wants an interface. That issue came up very early, and it was dealt with very early. For the record, therefore, there was agreement on that as well; nobody wants to create an interface. However, it is a huge site. It can accommodate all the things that were discussed in the advisory group at the beginning.

One cannot ignore the fact that 95% of the housing list is nationalist. That is a huge area that needs to be dealt with. We have two Ministers from North Belfast: Minister McCausland and Minister Ní Chuilín, who could not make it today because she has other ministerial business. They, of course, have duties outside of North Belfast, but what an opportunity for those two Departments to get together on an issue like this. There are issues beyond housing that involve the Mater Hospital, St Malachy's College, small and medium-sized enterprises, the social economy, leisure, tourism, culture —

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

Mr G Kelly: — the Crumlin Road jail and others.

We can make a difference. Leadership is needed from the political parties on the basis of objective need, and we need a strategy for that. Go raibh maith agat.

Ms P Bradley: The DUP recognises the importance and huge potential of the Girdwood site and the adjacent Crumlin Road jail to North Belfast and, of course, the wider city. Given its significance, it is vital that any decisions are based on a shared vision for the site and have the aim of bringing benefits to all the communities that live nearby. The site offers an opportunity to stimulate economic development and job creation, to provide a shared community hub and to allow for the expansion of healthcare services at the Mater Hospital.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does she agree that space is required for the Mater Hospital to expand the services and facilities that need to be there, particularly given recent medical announcements? Does she also agree that the prison can very clearly provide a site for the digital hub for Belfast, and that the prison cells could be used as incubation units for business development? Furthermore, as regards the cultural corridor of that part of the city, does she agree that the hotel, tourism and hospitality industry can be of great benefit to North Belfast?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms P Bradley: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank my colleague. I agree, especially about the expansion of the Mater Hospital. There is definitely a need for that. There is also a need for North Belfast to get into that league and to have more tourism. There is so much potential.

Mr A Maginness: I agree with the Member that the Mater Hospital needs to expand. Will she support me and others in asking for the heritage people to remove their preservation order on the wall so that the rear part of the jail can be used by the Mater Hospital?

Ms P Bradley: As the Member probably knows, that matter has been explored. The wall has to remain intact.

The development could be a beacon for the rest of the city and elsewhere if it is based on inclusion and the principle of shared space. However, if that vision is not adhered to, the huge potential of the site will be lost and it will serve only to reinforce division in that part of our city. It is for that reason that the unilateral announcements by the previous two SDLP Ministers for Social Development about social housing on that site were wrong. Those announcements were made without Executive approval, and they ignored the established inter-community planning process. That approach regarding a site at a major North Belfast interface represented the abandonment of the principle of creating a shared space and was destabilising for local community relations.

As my colleague Mr Humphrey has said, the announcement that was made in March in the run-up to the Assembly and local government elections appeared to be an example of blatant electioneering on the part of the SDLP Minister. I am, therefore, pleased that the now Minister for Social Development, Nelson McCausland, has returned the process to a holistic and collaborative approach. I warmly welcome Minister McCausland's intention to develop Girdwood in a manner that will bring benefit to and have the support of the entire community.

The promotion of economic development, shared services and shared community space should be central components of activity at the

site to address the issues of disadvantage in adjacent areas. The issue will be a strong test of the Executive's commitment to their shared future strategy, and it is vital that the decisions made are in the best interests of all the people and communities in North Belfast.

Mr Copeland: I rise to speak on the matter with the words of my late great uncle Fred Loney ringing in my ears. He had a saying: "Girdwood: don't go near it". That was largely predicated against his experience in 1939, when he received at his place of work a letter that instructed him to go to Girdwood and to bring a packed lunch. He went, and he got home in 1946, having been evacuated out of France several weeks after D-Day and having spent several months as a guest of the Japanese, which seriously jaundiced his view.

The site offers a combination of opportunity and challenge, and those are a dangerous mix at the best of times, and even more so if you take them into a district without a completely thought-through plan such as the location of the site. I vividly remember two things that strike me from my early youth. First, I remember speaking to our foreman joiner at work, who, the night before, saw the house that he was born into and in which his parents had lived for decades, in what was called the Bally streets, burned. He never really recovered his trust or his faith in society. Secondly, a little-known fact is that my wife lived on the Oldpark Road when her father was a police constable, in the days when policemen lived in rented accommodation.

The eyes of a considerable number of people look at the site. As I said, it offers a mixture of challenge and opportunity. The way in which it is developed must be according to a plan and a strategy, and the single most important component of that is agreement on the ground. If it is seen to be a victory for one side over the other, it simply restates the integrity of the argument that got us to where we got to some decades ago. There have always been pressures in inner cities, and there are competing pressures in this one. There are competing pressures for houses, for those who will occupy the houses, for recreation, for industry and commerce and, possibly, for the expansion of the hospital. It is difficult to make an argument that we should have 100, 200, 300 or 400 houses in the absence of a plan that shows how those houses relate to the district that they are in.

Mr G Kelly: On that point, everyone who has spoken has agreed that it should be a multi-use site and that housing should be one of those uses. Will the Member accept that housing should be a part of it, leaving aside the numbers that are involved?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Copeland: Sir, there is barely a working-class district in this city where the provision of social housing is not an issue about which we should all be rightly concerned. The issue is the way in which it is provided and the way in which it allows the occupant of each house to relate to his neighbours and to those in the district in which he lives. In my view, the secret to a settled society is a citizen in his home with his family, in close proximity to his place of employment, if such a thing exists, living in an established and defined relationship with his neighbours. If this is not done right — I am not suggesting that it will not be done right — the ramifications for the entire district will be lifelong.

Mr Humphrey: Given that the Member knows the area, he will know that, to the north of the site, there is a wall that had to be built by the Northern Ireland Office a number of years ago as a peace wall. North Belfast has more interfaces than any other constituency in Northern Ireland, and as other Members have said, it serves no community and is for the betterment of no community for more interfaces to be created. I am sure that the Member will agree.

Mr Copeland: I agree absolutely that interfaces are a legacy — a blight to some — and the steps that have been taken to solve interfaces provide to others a source of comfort, no matter how difficult they are for others to accept socially.

My point is that were I to be presented with a plan that showed the various component parts in totality — the housing, the recreation, the potential for commerce or industry, the relationship with the hospital, and the wall — I would personally feel that I could make a judgement. I give no guarantees that the decision that I would take from that judgement would be right, but I would feel that I had available to me all the information on which I could make a judgement.

I do not think that the right way to bake a cake is to determine, first of all, that there will be fruit in it and then to pick one type of fruit and

judge everything else from that piece of fruit. The entire thing has to be integrated, thought through, consulted upon and judged by the people who will be most affected; namely, those who will live, bring up their families and be educated there and, hopefully, find a method of earning a living for themselves.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Would the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Copeland: Thank you very much indeed, sir.

Mrs Cochrane: I appreciate being able to contribute to this debate as I consider it to be of great significance. As we are all aware, North Belfast is one of the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland and the most fragmented part of the city. It also has one of the lengthiest waiting lists for social housing, largely because housing areas have remained highly segregated. There tends to be overcrowding in nationalist areas and vacant spaces in some unionist areas. As a result, a significantly higher proportion of those waiting to be housed come from a nationalist background.

Tackling disadvantage and normalising good relationships belong together, so improving access to housing, employment and education is crucial. Yet the idea of creating additional housing on that prime site has become an extremely contentious issue, with other parties splitting along their usual lines. The true concept of a shared future does not mean a shared-out future.

Although I recognise that the site has its sensitivities, those alone cannot be a reason not to develop it. There is serious need for more housing in North Belfast, and it would be absurd if the finished site had no residential aspect. It is my understanding that housing was historically always part of the plan for Girdwood, and as long as it is designed with local sensitivities in mind, it would go a long way in significantly relieving housing stress in North Belfast.

One of the primary development principles that the draft master plan was based on was:

> *"there is a common aspiration for a transformational shared future scheme, whilst also addressing pressing needs in the locality and wider area".*

In accordance with that aim, shared housing standards need to be created in order to promote good relations and to create a diverse, inclusive and aspirational environment in which to live. However, social housing should always be allocated based on need alone. We need to be practical and recognise that due to a significantly higher need from the nationalist community, more nationalists are likely to be housed in that area. Therefore, a task vital to the success of the Girdwood site will be to ensure that people may live in and use the site freely without necessarily belonging to the numerically dominant resident group.

Considerations should be given to equal access to the site, for those living on it and those coming in to the site, so that there are no chill factors to any access. Therefore, it is essential that the site includes plenty of shared space that is viewed as safe and welcoming to all. Shared space also allows maximum opportunities for positive interaction and minimises opportunity costs arising from blighted or segregated land.

Mr Humphrey referred to the aims laid out by the Girdwood advisory panel. Mr Kelly drew attention to the word "live" in those aims. Therefore, housing needs to form part of that regeneration.

In order to create a project of such international significance, those homes should seek to set a new benchmark for housing by incorporating the highest standards of energy efficiency and use of renewables. Consideration should also be given to incorporating and integrating a significant number of social housing properties as well as affordable family homes and suitable housing for the elderly, single persons and those with a disability. Therefore, I urge the Minister to progress urgently the development of the site.

5.00 pm

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): First of all, I thank the Members who contributed to the debate today. I welcome the opportunity to respond and clarify some of the issues that have been raised this afternoon.

Unfortunately, I have to start with a short history lesson. Back in December 2001, the then First Minister, deputy First Minister and Social Development Minister asked Roy Adams, Monsignor Tom Toner and Rev Dr John Dunlop to look at the problems across North Belfast and bring forward a report with recommendations that could start to address the issues affecting that community. The Dunlop report, as it became known, was published in May 2002 and, among other things, recommended that government

develop a major site involving mixed usage to serve as a symbol of hope and economic regeneration for North Belfast. I note in the report the little phrase that the project would have to be taken forward over a sustained period and include dialogue, partnership working and a non-coercive approach, which would be fundamental to success. For that reason, when the Girdwood site became available in 2006, DSD acquired it to make good that recommendation and quickly established an advisory panel to make recommendations on the use of the site. A draft integrated master plan for Girdwood and the adjacent former Crumlin Road jail was published in October 2007. It maintained the theme in the Dunlop report that the site should be developed on a mixed-use basis for the benefit of the entire community.

Excellent progress has been made on the refurbishment of the jail, and we look forward to its opening next year as an exciting new tourist destination in North Belfast. It will bring employment, enjoyment and new opportunities to the area. The master plan also envisaged mixed-use development on the Girdwood site, with provision for a range of activities, including community leisure, playing fields, work space, residential units and space for the Mater Hospital. One of the key points, however, was that:

> *"the issue of residential development on the Gaol/Girdwood site is extremely contentious - a legacy of the civil unrest in Northern Ireland which has resulted in highly segregated housing in North Belfast ... Fundamental to obtaining community support will be ongoing commitment by government to securing the regeneration of the deprived residential areas adjacent to the site."*

That is a reference to lower Shankill and lower Oldpark. Reference has been made to those communities already.

Mr G Kelly: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McCausland: Yes, as long as I get an extra minute.

Mr G Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way.

Mr McCausland: I will not get an extra minute, so I will not give way. *[Laughter.]*

Mr G Kelly: It is a very small point.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, Minister, you had already given way.

Mr G Kelly: The Minister mentioned lower Shankill and lower Oldpark. Does he accept that the reference was also to Cliftonville?

Mr McCausland: I was on the working group and was key in getting that phrase in. The reference was to the differential deprivation. When you look at lower Oldpark and lower Shankill, you are dealing with communities that have been seriously neglected. I agree that there is deprivation in all of the general area; I do not dispute that. That was the particular issue there. Sadly, there was not the work done over the intervening period in regard to those two communities, in spite of repeated requests from the local community and political representatives.

The master plan also said:

> *"The Panel recommends, therefore, the continuation of cross-community dialogue on the housing issue, which should involve learning more about successful initiatives elsewhere, in terms of mixed-use, multi-tenure regeneration projects. With time, dialogue and goodwill, the Panel is convinced that a solution will be found to this very sensitive issue."*

Unfortunately, in the intervening period under the previous two Social Development Ministers, Margaret Ritchie and Alex Attwood, there was, first of all, no progress on lower Oldpark and lower Shankill. The only thing that we managed to get in lower Oldpark was an extension of a peace line to protect some houses. Apart from that, nothing was done to regenerate the area, and year after year passed. So, there was no real progress on that score. Secondly, we did not see the development of the dialogue that was talked about in the master plan. As a result, we had four wasted years. Gerry Kelly asked why, during the intervening period, there had not been progress. He is right: it is an opportunity for the whole community, and there should have been progress. Sadly, those were four wasted years.

Now we come to February 2010. The terms "Slieve Donard", "SDLP council" and "SDLP leadership" come to mind. In that context, Margaret Ritchie made an announcement. Most people, if they are honest about it, will admit that there was a connection between her bid for the leadership of the SDLP and her grand announcement about the site, a point already made by William Humphrey. The second announcement, which was almost a repeat of the first, was made by Alex Attwood on 14 March 2011 and was possibly not unconnected to an election that was due to take place some

weeks later. On each occasion, it would seem to most people — certainly to anyone I spoke to — that this was political opportunism and they had abandoned the vision of a shared site and a shared future and pursued a narrow political agenda.

Unfortunately, little progress has been made. However, since coming into office, over the summer months, I have instructed my officials to work with Belfast City Council and the local community to finalise the council's plans for a community hub on the site. We are all pleased that £9·6 million has been provisionally granted to Belfast City Council for that project. That is central to the development of the site. Building on the refurbishment of the jail and the opportunities presented by the hub, I have asked my officials to review the implementation of the other uses proposed in the master plan for Girdwood to see what further progress can be made to deliver those. That work is under way, and I expect an initial report to be ready for my consideration early in the new year. So, after four wasted years, we aim now to have the initial report ready in a matter of months.

The implementation review will also look at the wider development context for inner north Belfast to maximise the opportunities for regeneration across the area. However, I am conscious that, since the advisory panel highlighted its options for the site in 2007, the economic climate has changed, and that will obviously have an impact on what happens. However, I recently met my colleague Edwin Poots, the Health Minister, and together we toured the area to discuss the options and see the potential that the Mater Hospital could contribute to the regeneration efforts. In that context, I also privately met Bishop Treanor, and we have had conversations on the issue with a range of stakeholders.

My approach is to develop the site on an integrated and comprehensive basis rather than through piecemeal developments. That strategic approach is, in my view, consistent with the recommendations in both the Dunlop report and, more recently, the report by the advisory group on Girdwood. Although we have heard much today about the need for housing on the site, housing development alone cannot regenerate or sustain communities, certainly not in an area of the city that has suffered so much in the recent past. I have said for many years that Girdwood represents a significant opportunity to regenerate this part of the city in a way that both communities can buy into and benefit from. It must be delivered for the good of all the community in a genuinely shared manner. The previous Social Development Ministers made announcements about housing on Girdwood in order to move forward on one element of the required regeneration package. In my view, that goes against the very principles first outlined in the Dunlop report nearly 10 years ago and flies in the face of what was included in the report produced as a master plan by the advisory group.

In the meantime, we continue to meet housing need across North Belfast as we do everywhere else in Northern Ireland. North Belfast has benefited from over 1,000 new homes in the past five years alone, and we have made nearly 3,500 allocations in the same period as a result of new housing alongside the reletting of existing homes. Even in this current financial year, there are plans to start building a further 166 new homes in this part of the city. In that respect, Girdwood is perhaps something of a red herring.

Alongside our existing stock, we will continue to help those in greatest housing need. The recent funding I made available to support first-time buyers will also help to move people off the waiting list and into low-cost home ownership. In looking to meet housing need, we must not be fixated on newbuild alone.

As an elected representative of the constituency, I assure you that North Belfast is never far from my thoughts. Only last year, my Department announced plans to replace 276 old terraced houses along the upper long streets, Parkside and Queen Victoria Gardens with 147 new and modern family homes. That work is well under way and represents a commitment of £38 million. It is not dependent on Girdwood in any shape or manner.

I welcome what has been said today in highlighting the issue. I hope that this brings the clarity that everyone was looking for. I will finish with a quotation from Alban Maginness. In March 2006, he said:

> *"The windfall sites of Torrens and Girdwood will do much to relieve the pressure over the next two or three years but we are going to continue to have a short-term housing crisis in relation to the Catholic community in North Belfast."*

The point about Torrens being a windfall site was one of the comments that did more than anything else to poison community relations.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please draw your remarks to a close.

Mr McCausland: A lot of work has had to be done to rebuild the relationships that were damaged by his comments, and those relationships are being rebuilt.

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

Adjourned at 5.10 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Thursday 17 November 2011

The Assembly met at 11.00 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Ministerial Statement: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy

Mr Speaker: Today's sitting has been arranged following a request from the First Minister and the deputy First Minister that the House should meet for the purpose of hearing two ministerial statements.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister will make the first statement, which relates to the Programme for Government and the investment strategy. The First Minister will deliver the first half of the statement. The deputy First Minister will deliver the second half. They will then answer any questions alternately, with the First Minister answering the first question.

Before we begin, I remind the House that, with the exception of the Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, Members may ask only one question. I understand that, because of the nature of both statements, Members might have an urge to deliver their own statement to the House. I assure Members that that will not happen this morning. Quite a number of Members wish to ask a question on the statement. We will try to let all Members ask a question, but I urge Members not to deliver their own statement to the House. If that is clear, we shall move on.

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): Four years ago, following the restoration of devolution, the Executive launched their first Programme for Government. Today, we take our next step forward, building on what we have achieved and setting new and ambitious targets, with 76 commitments to the people of Northern Ireland. Just a few hours ago, the Executive agreed a draft Programme for Government and a draft investment strategy. This morning, the deputy First Minister and I are pleased to present them to the Assembly. I believe that these and other agreements that have been reached in recent days across a host of areas and documents mark an encouraging step change in performance by the Executive and are a template for improved working together in the future.

At the outset, I want to thank all the officials who have given so much assistance in the preparation of the documents. I also thank the Ministers and officials from each of the Departments, as they have assisted over recent weeks and months. Ultimately, however, it will be the Ministers who will take responsibility for the commitments and will be accountable to the people of Northern Ireland for their delivery.

Our Programme for Government (PFG) is a clear statement of intent. It is a statement that we in Northern Ireland are prepared to take responsibility for our future, that we are prepared to modernise and reform and, most importantly, that Northern Ireland is moving forward as one community. Through this Programme for Government, we will seek to rebuild and rebalance our economy and to address the legacy of division that lingers from the past. We will seek to reform key public services, and we will protect those most vulnerable and in need in the community.

Our image and reputation across the world is changing. Once held back by conflict, we now attract international interest and investment. Just look at the impression that we made across the world with the recent MTV awards, which proved that we can attract global attention and that Northern Ireland can proudly showcase itself alongside the best that the world has to offer.

Devolution allows us to set our own priorities and to chart our own course for the future. These two documents are not the property or preserve of any party in the Assembly or the Executive. Rather, they represent a compromise and combination of the wishes of all. As we face into the challenges to come, I believe that this will be a strength rather than a weakness.

In the Executive, we all recognise the importance of working together to achieve a common goal. This has never been more important than in the current financial climate. Every day, we hear stories about the debt crisis, financial instability and public sector cutbacks, and we hear about the pain that those issues cause for ordinary families. Our job is not to stand back and observe but to use the powers and resources at our disposal to make a difference.

The world is changing, with instantaneous global communications, global markets and increased international travel. We can see the fruits of that change in Northern Ireland, with recent major investments by companies such as the New York Stock Exchange, Citi, Allstate and Coca-Cola, and we can see it in the growth of the television and film industry here. We regularly see investment announcements that we could not have contemplated over the past 20 years. Over that time, communications technology has been put in place to support those industries.

I was greatly encouraged yesterday when the deputy First Minister and I visited Allen and Overy's new Belfast offices to speak to young people who had left Northern Ireland in past years to seek opportunities abroad but whom the pursuit of greater opportunities in this generation had brought back home. We can also see growth in the number of people who choose to come here from across the world, both as tourists and to settle. The truth is that we are now fully fledged members of the international community. I welcome that and look forward to the trend continuing into the future. However, living in a smaller world is not always easy. We are as susceptible to the cold winds of recession as anywhere else, and we need to find ways to protect our people from the worst impacts of downturns. That is why we need a Programme for Government that can really deliver on the ground. The real test of these documents will come not today or even during the consultation period but in their capacity to deliver over the next four years. It is the delivery on the ground, not the words in the document, on which we will all ultimately be judged.

Our Programme for Government focuses on the issues that are most important to the man or woman in the street. We have identified the problems that are a cause of concern for people, and, more importantly, we have sought to demonstrate what we will do, in the most straightforward terms, to deal with those problems.

The Programme for Government is a visible commitment by the Executive to work with the people of Northern Ireland to address all the problems that we face and to provide the groundwork for economic and social recovery. In this time of rising unemployment, our top commitment is to support the promotion of more jobs in the local economy — over 25,000 new jobs.

We will continue to press for the devolution of corporation tax, and, if and when it is devolved, we will reduce its level. Although we have no guarantee of success in that endeavour, a reduced level of corporation tax would enable us to level the playing field with our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland and provide us with a very strong stimulus to promote the private sector growth that is necessary to rebalance our economy.

While we continue to press for the devolution of corporation tax, we must take immediate steps to address the challenges that we face. We need to focus on our existing businesses and to secure and develop our reputation as a source of high-quality and high value-added products. In that regard, we are committed to supporting £300 million of investment by businesses in research and development, with at least 20% coming from small and medium-sized enterprises; increasing our manufacturing exports by 15%; supporting 200 projects through the creative industries innovation fund; increasing visitor numbers to 3·6 million by 2013; increasing tourist revenue to £625 million by 2013; and introducing an extension of the small business rate relief scheme until 2015.

Today, we are also announcing our decision that, when the powers are devolved to the Assembly, we will eliminate air passenger duty on all direct long-haul flights. That can help make Northern Ireland an attractive destination for tourism and investment alike.

Growing a vibrant economy will transform our society, and that will, in turn, form the basis of an economic, social and physical renewal. Through the economy, we will provide people with an opportunity to use their skills to create a wealthier and happier future for everyone here. However, it is important to remember that the economy is a mechanism for improving people's lives and is not an end in itself. This Programme for Government has been developed for the people of Northern Ireland, and it is only by providing our people with the necessary support and encouragement that we will give them the opportunity to rebuild and rebalance our economy.

At a fundamental level, the programme identifies a range of measures designed to meet people's basic human needs, including commitments to deliver 8,000 social and affordable homes and to introduce initiatives aimed at reducing fuel poverty. The Programme for Government also includes commitments to address the issue of childcare and the needs of children through increased preschool education provision. Those are not only good things to do for the sake of the children but are strong economic measures that will promote growth by enabling more parents to participate in the economy.

With the devolution of policing and justice powers, we have taken responsibility for those key areas. We will also take action to improve community safety by tackling antisocial behaviour and crime against older and vulnerable people by, among other measures, more effective and appropriate sentencing.

Our Programme for Government also includes more innovative measures, such as the new £80 million social investment fund, which will address dereliction; promote the physical regeneration of deprived areas; improve pathways to employment for people who are not working; and tackle deprivation in communities.

11.15 am

One of the key challenges for this Assembly term will be to deal with the legacy of division in our community. That is why I am determined that, over the course of this Programme for Government, we really begin to break down the barriers. I want to see us moving towards the day when, with the agreement of local people, we rid ourselves of the community divisions that have manifested themselves in so-called peace walls and all the tensions that go along with them. The divisions in our community were not created overnight and will not be solved overnight, but we must make a start, and there is no more important place to start than with our young people. That is why we will review how we can advance shared education to ensure that all children have access to shared education programmes.

The direction of travel that is mapped by these commitments flows from our determination to build a united community. No past Government, devolved or direct rule, has displayed our level of ambition to remove the "them and us" educational experience that so many of us faced in our youth. No past Government, devolved or direct rule, has displayed such a level of resolve to build a new society through encouraging, step by step, our young people to grow together rather than apart. What an example it will be to see children working and playing together.

The Programme for Government sets out a challenging agenda for all of us. The Executive alone cannot take forward all the reforms that are necessary to deliver this programme. We need the full and enthusiastic participation and support of people across society, including the public, private and voluntary sectors. In government we need to find ways to engage with the people who use our services, so that we can deliver more effective outcomes with the finite resources available to us.

Public sector reform is not an easy issue to address, but it needs to be discussed openly and honestly. When people in our society are suffering in the aftermath of a deep and sustained global recession, we cannot afford to allow any waste of the valuable resources to which we have access. There are commitments in the programme that reflect this reality, including the implementation of local government reform and commitments to agree any changes to post-2015 structures of government in 2012 and improve online access to government services.

Alongside the Programme for Government, the investment strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) is another key vehicle for reform. At a time of financial cutbacks, it is extremely important that we spend every penny carefully and wisely. More than ever, the investment strategy is needed as an essential planning tool. It enables us to prioritise infrastructure programmes that will deliver the best return and secure value for

money. It also supports our efforts to protect jobs and to rebalance and rebuild the economy.

The current plan includes proposals for some £12·5 billion of expenditure. Although that amount is a reduction on that in the previous investment strategy because of the UK coalition Government's significant reduction in our capital Budget allocation and may reduce further as a result of the recent announcement by the Irish Government in relation to the A5 and A8 road projects, it is, nonetheless, a very substantial base on which we can develop our assets.

The investment strategy includes plans to complete the Londonderry to Coleraine rail relay; progress the transport master plan for Belfast city centre as part of a scheme for the introduction of rapid transit in Belfast; commit significant investment to the electricity grid and interconnection, so that consumers benefit from the single electricity market and security of supply is improved and to ensure that wind energy can be utilised more effectively. The strategy also plans to maintain the condition of the motorway and trunk road network, which extends to 25,000 km of public roads and footways.

In addition, there are measures in the investment strategy to support and develop our people. For example, approximately £2·3 billion is to be invested in our health infrastructure over the next 10 years. Proposals include building a network of primary and community-based care centres and approximately £2·5 billion to be invested in our social infrastructure, such as the Metropolitan Arts Centre.

The Programme for Government and the investment strategy for Northern Ireland reflect our commitment to build a better future. However, those key plans also include specific actions to deliver against our commitments. The reality is that we cannot simply react passively to world events as they happen. We need to proactively seek out the opportunities for Northern Ireland to become a leading light in the recovery that will inevitably follow the bad times.

Four years ago, we began a new journey and a new era of devolved government. For the first time in a generation, we completed a full Assembly term and began the job of building a better future for the people of Northern Ireland. In four years' time, it is not survival but delivery on which we will be judged. That is a measure of how far we have come. The Programme for Government and the investment strategy give us the platform on which we will build. We have overcome many difficulties and hurdles along the way, and, in the next four years, we will demonstrate that politics can and will work to ensure that Northern Ireland becomes a better, brighter and more prosperous place in which to live.

I will now hand over to the deputy First Minister, who will set out other aspects of the Programme for Government and the investment strategy.

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I would like to thank the First Minister for introducing the Programme for Government and the investment strategy. I want to build on some of the things that have been touched on so far and to focus Members' attention on some of the most important aspects of the programme and the strategy before us today.

I share the view that we can compete with the best that the world has to offer. One excellent example of that is Derry city winning the City of Culture title against tough competition. Just think for a moment about the scale of that win for everyone. In the six months to June 2011, enquiries at the tourism information centre from international tourists were up by 57%. There are plans to build six new hotels for 2013 and to open a number of new camp parks, and existing hotels are seeking to extend. That will leave a lasting and positive mark on the north-west.

The fact that a city that has a relatively small population was able to draw on such a deep well of talent to win such a prestigious prize is testament to not only Derry but the North generally, and it is by no means the only example. In 2013, the World Police and Fire Games are due to be held here. That will be a huge global sporting event, which came here not by accident but because the organisers know that we can deliver. The important point is that we have momentum building, and we need to capitalise on that momentum to ensure that we reap the long-term benefits from our confidence and the international interest we enjoy. However, that is not going to happen by accident.

The Programme for Government is our opportunity to consolidate the progress that we have made, to deal with the very real and challenging issues that we face and to confirm how we plan to move ahead over the coming years. For the programme to mean anything, it needs to set out our plans in very simple terms, and that is why we have chosen to structure it

around specific commitments to our people. Those commitments reflect issues that people are telling us about.

Before we look at some of the commitments that we make in the programme, it is worth thinking about what is happening across the world and how we should react to that. The first thing to understand is that the economy has changed radically. To put it simply, we collectively — I include all of us in this — need to raise our game in order to improve the economy. However, we are determined to strike the right balance between addressing the need for economic growth and tackling poverty and disadvantage. We need to work on a level playing field by pressing hard for the devolution of corporation tax. We need to go after £300 million of foreign direct investment and to ensure that we include social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction, so that local people benefit from departmental expenditure.

What we are seeing at an international level is a move away from paper assets of questionable value towards physical assets that have a definite and increasing value. In other words, the economy is beginning to reflect the true price of raw materials and energy. That is not a temporary change but a long-term trend that reflects the growing pressure on resources worldwide. Against that backdrop, we cannot simply go after growth at all costs. We need to go for sustainable growth, and we need to be much more careful about how we use energy and raw materials, because the market will demand it. In fact, the market is already demanding it. A quick drive past the Belfast shipyard, where they are assembling huge wind turbines, demonstrates the extent to which energy is valued today. Similarly, a trip to a factory in Portadown that makes 50% of the egg boxes in Britain from recycled paper demonstrates the way in which the value of resources has changed.

The rules of the game are changing, so we, too, need to change. We need to make the very best use of our physical assets, such as our beautiful environment, and reduce the size of our ecological footprint in the process. That is why the Programme for Government includes a commitment to invest over £500 million to promote more sustainable modes of travel; a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 35%; a commitment to encourage industry to achieve 20% of electricity consumption from renewables by 2015; and a commitment to improve the thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensure full double glazing in its properties.

The new rules of the global economy go beyond physical assets. We need to ensure that our people operate to the very best of their capabilities. When huge countries such as China and India are skilling up and improving their economies exponentially, we need to work hard to ensure that we have something unique to offer so that we can carve out a unique role for ourselves in the global economy. Our people must be at the centre of our plans for economic growth.

Taking that into account, the programme also contains commitments to increase the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve at least five GCSEs; improve literacy and numeracy levels among all school leavers, with additional resources targeted at areas of educational underachievement; insert social clauses into procurement contracts; increase the number of university places in economically relevant subjects such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics, leading to an increase in the number of graduates in those subject areas; and an Education and Skills Authority (ESA) that will be operational in 2013.

Sometimes, in discussions about the economy, we lose sight of people. I sometimes hear talk about economic growth and equality as if those were conflicting and contradictory aims; nothing could be further from the truth. People deserve equality; it is their right. Equality is also a key factor in economic growth. When people find themselves to be discriminated against on the basis of their gender, skin colour, religion, political opinion or sexual orientation, there is a danger that they will not be able to make their unique contribution to society. Strong economies know that inequality is a luxury that they can ill afford. For example, although they have had their own challenges over the years, several Scandinavian countries have performed very well economically while holding firm to the principle of equality. It makes sense when you think about it. Relative inequalities cost more in terms of mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, violence, educational outcomes and physical health. So we need to ensure that, as we move ahead and grow our private sector, we keep the principle of equality at the forefront

of our thinking. Equality is a moral imperative, and we cannot have a society where certain groups, by virtue of their gender, race or religion, for example, should be excluded unfairly from an opportunity to secure all the benefits that our society provides. Equality also makes good business sense. If we unfairly exclude certain sections from participating fully in our society, we all lose. Equal societies always do better across all the indicators that are measured.

We need to keep a very close eye on equality during the turbulent times in which we live. The reduction in public expenditure and the aftermath of the major recession will undoubtedly have a very serious impact on the poorest in our society, with all the associated financial and human costs that that entails. I see worrying reports that unemployment is increasing again, particularly among young people. While we cannot control the global economy, it is the duty of everyone in the Assembly and in the Executive to do everything in our power to ensure that the impacts of the global recession are mitigated.

11.30 am

The Programme for Government recognises that imperative and focuses on a range of commitments, with the express purpose of tackling disadvantage. For example, there are commitments to fulfil our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; to tackle rural poverty through a £13 million package of funding; to use the £20 million per annum social protection fund to help individuals and families facing hardship due to the current economic downturn; and to introduce new health and social care measures to tackle long-term or chronic conditions that tend to impact disproportionately on people who are deprived.

In addition to those commitments, we have made broader decisions in the Programme for Government that will help to improve the quality of life of everyone and that will have a particularly positive impact on people who are experiencing deprivation. For example, tackling antisocial behaviour will make a huge difference to the people and communities who have lived through some of the most difficult economic and social conditions here.

We must go well beyond making conditions better within the existing framework. If we are to move ahead, we must find new ways to engage between communities and to encourage communities to engage with each other. For example, there are plans to deliver at least 30 schemes to improve landscapes in public areas in order to promote private sector investment. Undoubtedly, those will improve the use of shared space, building on some of the excellent work that communities are taking forward.

We have some major physical assets that can make a real contribution to those efforts. For example, the programme includes key commitments to develop Maze/Long Kesh as a regeneration site of regional significance; to develop and implement the One Plan for the regeneration of Derry, incorporating the key former military sites at Fort George and Ebrington; and to significantly progress work on the plan for the Lisanelly shared education campus, which will involve a range of schools in Omagh from different sectors and with different ranges of ability coming together on the same site. The good news is that all those projects and initiatives, which promote sharing of space, are working in the same direction as the tide of history. They reflect a new dispensation at a political level.

Beyond that, we need to remember that distance is not what it used to be. We really need to keep that at the forefront of our minds as we rebuild and rebalance our society and the economy. Places that once accepted a level of isolation and marginalisation now find themselves fully engaged with the rest of the world. That is not a theoretical concept but a day-to-day fact. It is obvious to anyone who visits us that we have changed. People will hear new accents and languages. That development should be welcomed by all of us. For the first time, we are no longer a society isolated at the edge of Europe; we are very much a part of the global community.

The investment strategy is an extremely important strand in achieving the transformation that we have set out in the Programme for Government. It is, of course, a greater challenge in the context of a reduced overall Budget compared with previous years. However, I also believe that the reduced Budget represents an opportunity to really think carefully about what it is we are prioritising. The aim must be to deliver a balanced programme of investment that can underpin economic growth while focusing on equality and sustainability.

We are acutely aware of the difficulties facing workers, particularly those in the construction sector. Where it is appropriate, therefore, we

will seek to bring forward investment in those public works that are more labour-intensive in preference to schemes that deliver a lower employment impact. I mentioned some of the key regeneration projects that will help us to achieve sustainable growth. I am sure that, at this stage of proceedings, Members would not thank me for listing all the investment strategy commitments. I also want to make sure that I do not spoil the ending for Members when they read it themselves.

However, it is worth highlighting some of the key schemes to demonstrate that we are taking action and moving forward. For example, we expect that construction work on the three sports stadiums, as agreed with the IFA, the GAA and Ulster Rugby, will commence in 2013. It will provide a significant economic boost during construction and create regeneration opportunities in the areas in which they are sited.

The construction of the new police, prisons and fire training college outside Cookstown will make a significant contribution to the improvement of front line services and create an unprecedented opportunity for all three services to work and train together in a way that was not possible in the past. It will also provide a significant boost to employment and regeneration in the wider area.

The advancement of the relocation of the headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) outside Belfast by 2015 is an important initiative to enhance the availability of quality public sector jobs in rural areas. More than £2 billion will be invested in our education estate over the life of the strategy. There will be a capital grants scheme for our universities, helping them to plan ahead strategically. The social and affordable housing development, decent homes, warm homes and disabled adaptions programmes will continue to be delivered, sheltering and supporting those who are most in need.

In conclusion, we have a Programme for Government for everyone and an investment strategy that will be a catalyst for our agreed outcomes, whether in the public, private or community sectors. I pay tribute to all the officials who have been involved in the very difficult work of putting all this together in recent times. I thank all the Ministers in the Executive for the very positive way that the Executive meeting was held last night. I commend the Programme for Government and the investment strategy to the Assembly. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Elliott (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the First Minister and deputy First Minister for bringing the draft Programme for Government to the House today. I would like to put on record my thanks and those of the Committee for the work that has gone into it so far. I welcome the eventual publication of the Programme for Government, the investment strategy and the economic strategy. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has not had the opportunity to view or to digest the document in any great detail until now, but I thank the First Minister and the deputy First Minister for meeting the Deputy Chair of the Committee and myself at 10.30 am today.

Obviously, I would have preferred it if the document had come forward some months earlier, but the fact is that it has come now, and I am not going to be begrudging. It would be quite easy for me to begrudge it, but why should we do that now? I have called for the document for eight months so I am pleased about and welcome its publication and look forward to working with it.

There are areas in the document that, I assume, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will have issues with and may wish to see changed. There are issues that we may wish to see included that are not, and issues that we would like to see moved on as quickly as possible. We will make those issues clear during the consultation period. We will use that opportunity to do that, as I am sure every party will.

I note that the draft PFG states that the Executive will:

> *"deliver a range of measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion".*

I wonder whether there is any thought process as to how those measures will be delivered and whether there are any specifics within them.

Secondly, the draft notes that the Executive will:

> *"agree any changes to post-2015 structures of Government in 2012".*

I ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that all representatives, all parties

and all Committees are included in that process and that we are not just lumbered with a document that is a fait accompli. I would like assurance that we will all be given reasonable opportunity to feed into that process.

Thirdly, it is curious that there are some issues not included in the PFG that were in the Budget that was agreed in March. Will any significant changes to the Budget be required because of the PFG and investment strategy?

Mr P Robinson: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for what I think was a welcome for the programme. Of course, the Committee will want to read it thoroughly, discuss it as a Committee and, perhaps, discuss it with us.

Of course, we will look with great interest and seriousness at whatever recommendations the Committee makes. It may be worth pointing out that this is not a fixed and final document. It is a consultation document, and although we have gone over a number of the features that are in it, it is going out for public consultation. The public have until 22 February 2012 to let us have their comments and views, after which — very quickly, I hope — we will be able to consider those comments and produce a final document. The deputy First Minister and I view it as a work in progress, and we are very willing to listen to good ideas and comments as we proceed.

Mr Elliott referred to the structures of government in 2012. I draw his attention to page 52 of the document, where the key commitments and the milestones and outputs are recognised. He will see that, under the reference to the key commitment to:

> *"Agree any changes to post-2015 structures of Government in 2012 (OFMDFM)"*

it states:

> *"(To be carried out in consultation with political parties)".*

That was a point that his colleague made last night and one to which there was no resistance on the Executive.

The Budget commitments that are contained in the document are based on the Budget as it stands. If further funding comes by way of Barnett consequentials or the Budget review group finding additional money, the situation will be improved. If we are given power over corporation tax issues, it is clear that we will have to revisit the targets in the Programme for Government and the investment strategy and those in the Budget. A number of features will change, but that is politics, as we have to react to the circumstances of the time.

Our approach to addressing poverty and inclusion will be based on the poverty outcomes model, which is designed to show where interventions will have the most significant effect in tackling multigenerational poverty. We have set aside £80 million for the social investment fund and £20 million in the current year for the social protection fund, with a commitment to attempt to find that funding for the additional years. The funds are specifically directed to those in greatest need. We have consistently argued that when we talk about poverty and child poverty, we are talking about poverty in the home. The best way in which to deal with poverty is to find people a job so that not only can they be productive in their own lives but they can have a wage that helps to keep their families. It is all tied up with the economy and getting more jobs into Northern Ireland. I am sure that my colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will have more to say about that when she unveils her economic strategy.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the First Minister for his statement. I congratulate him on the foreign direct investment that has been brought into the Province in the past number of years. What is it that has made Northern Ireland such a place for that foreign direct investment?

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I know the answer to that. I think that I said earlier that we were at Allen and Overy yesterday, but it was two days ago. That is something to do with the time at which we write our speeches. Therefore, a couple of days ago, the representative from Allen and Overy, when asked that same question, said immediately that the answer is the people.

For the size of our community, we probably have more young people than any other part of Europe. Sixty eight per cent of our population is under the age of 40. Clearly, I am in the minority, Mr Speaker. Those young people are well-educated, and we have better exam results than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. We have better exam results than the Republic

of Ireland. Therefore, we have people with the skills who are ready to do the work. We have a culture in common with North America, from where a very considerable amount of our new business and investment is coming.

We have a first-class technology infrastructure in Northern Ireland that has helped us to draw in jobs, particularly in the areas of IT and financial and business services. From that point of view, we have all the necessary ingredients to make Northern Ireland a very attractive place. Add to that a lower level of corporation tax and we will have a first-class environment that will be unbeatable.

11.45 am

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a thabhairt do na hAirí. I very much welcome the statement this morning about the Programme for Government. The Committee for Finance and Personnel, which I Chair, will look forward to receiving information on the monitoring arrangements for it, the targets in the Programme for Government and the targets in the Budget, which should reflect the Programme for Government.

I will give the deputy First Minister a chance to answer a question. There are commitments in the Programme for Government to £80 million for the social investment fund (SIF), as has been referred to by the First Minister, which will address dereliction and promote the physical regeneration of deprived areas, and £40 million to improve pathways to employment, tackle deprivation and increase community services. How does the deputy First Minister envisage —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Murphy: How does the deputy First Minister envisage those being taken forward to achieve their intended outcomes?

Mr M McGuinness: The social investment fund and the social protection fund were key initiatives to deal with the huge challenges that we all face as a result of the economic downturn. The social investment fund is designed to reduce poverty and disadvantage, based on objective need. It is recognised that some areas that have needs or are at risk may not be included in the neighbourhood renewal areas. The social investment fund, therefore, will enable communities to research and to include those areas in their action plans. Needs will have to be supported with evidence and will have to justify government intervention. There also needs to be evidence of community engagement; that is very important.

A public consultation on our proposals for SIF was launched on 27 September and will run up to and including 23 December 2011. The consultation process that is under way includes discussions on the extent and make-up of the zones. The zones have provisionally been identified to include disadvantaged areas and areas where there are educational needs, but they are also flexible, so can include other areas that may be at risk. They also enable the action plans to incorporate economic hubs as potential drivers for change in areas. The SIF is additional to existing programmes, but it will provide a joined-up government response to target needs in the areas. The £80 million will also act as leverage to bring in other funding from government and other sources to target interventions in areas. There is £79 million of the social investment fund profiled in years 2, 3 and 4 of this comprehensive spending review. Therefore, it cannot be spent in this financial year.

In addition to the social investment fund, the Executive have further proposed an £80 million social protection fund to assist those who are most in need in the wider community. The social protection fund programme will target individuals and families who face hardship due to the current economic downturn and pending welfare reforms.

These are very important programmes. The social investment fund is designed to tackle deprivation and the need for regeneration in areas, not just of a physical nature but to deal with the huge challenges faced by people who are marginalised and live in disadvantaged communities in regard to their well-being and the promotion of the well-being of their families. That has been generally well accepted in the Assembly, but it will be tested over a period to establish how it is working and how it is making fundamental changes to people's lives.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Dr Alasdair McDonnell, I remind Members that we should have questions to the statement. Let us not have further statements and then a question.

Dr McDonnell: Mr Speaker, thank you very much, but sometimes you have to explain your question, and — *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I encourage the Member not to do that. *[Laughter.]*

Dr McDonnell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I welcome the statement, in that we now have something to work on and it has very good points. However, there are some very big holes in it, which we will begin to dissect later. To me, it seems to suffer from a serious medical condition called total homonymous hemianopia. The man from Strabane would say: "it is very blind on one side". It has managed to pretend — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to come to his question.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am only learning to be leader and they should be kind to me. Is that not right? *[Laughter.]*

The document has managed to pretend that the rest of the island does not exist and vast opportunities for North/South co-operation have been ignored. However, we will come to that again. My concern is that in the previous Programme for Government, we had a commitment to the elimination of child poverty. Now, all we have is a commitment to:

> *"fulfil our commitments under the Child Poverty Act to reduce child poverty".*

I am not sure that if I went down the Newtownards Road, the Falls Road or the Shankill Road and told people that we would be providing them with a poverty outcomes model that they would be impressed with this Programme for Government. There is a serious issue of poverty in our community and on the ground, and I plead with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to do something about it. Our child poverty levels have increased —

Mr Speaker: I must insist.

Mr M McGuinness: I will resist asking for a medical dictionary to translate some of the comments that were made during the course of that question.

In relation to child poverty, officials in our Department have been working with other Departments on a child poverty reduction pilot study. That study was planned in advance of announcements in the welfare reform programme that those in work and on benefits will be able to retain more of their income. People on benefits and in work are allowed to retain a fraction of their income before their benefits are cut on a pound-for-pound basis. The study aims to measure the reduction in child poverty in low-income families that could result from engagement in a few hours' work without losing benefits and assess the difficulties that people face in seeking to access work, such as problems with childcare and transport, and any other issue that might arise.

The child poverty strategy was published on 24 March and sets out the actions proposed by the Executive to address the issue of child poverty here. Over the summer, the junior Ministers met departmental and non-departmental members of the poverty and social inclusion stakeholder forum to discuss the Departments' respective inputs to a child poverty action plan and to seek the views of the non-departmental members on what they would like to see in the plan. The stakeholder forum, which is chaired by the junior Ministers, met on 27 October 2011 to consider draft versions of the child poverty strategy action plan and the associated outcomes model to drive progress of the plan towards eradicating child poverty here.

So, under commitment No 43 we are pledged to:

> *"fulfil our commitments under the Child Poverty Act to reduce child poverty",*

complete the child poverty action plan, which will be based on the poverty outcomes model that is designed to show the interventions that will have most significant effect in tackling child poverty, and ensure that the action plan is consistent with the commitments made.

I think that it is very clear that we are dealing comprehensively with a huge challenge. We all recognise that, particularly in the context of the first Programme for Government, we had very challenging targets to reach. Also, against the backdrop of recognising that that Programme for Government was set in place, we were then hit with this avalanche of a world recession, which had a major impact on lots of things, not least the fact that when a new Government was elected in London, we saw very stringent economic measures put in place that deprived us of in the region of £4 billion for important infrastructural projects. So, these are huge challenges, but there is a duty and a responsibility on every Department to recognise the role that it has to play in moving forward.

Obviously, the North/South and east-west links are hugely important in helping us to deliver our priorities, and we are committed to developing them through day-to-day contact between Administrations as well as formal structures, such as the North/South Ministerial Council, which will meet tomorrow in Armagh, the British-Irish Council and the Joint Ministerial Committee. Through those activities and mechanisms, we will continue to work closely with the British and Irish Governments and other Administrations in ways that are both practical and mutually advantageous. That will bring benefits in respect of transport, infrastructure, trade and enterprise and will support progress across important sectors, such as agriculture, tourism and health. It will also help us to tackle major issues, such as social exclusion, barriers to mobility and fighting crime.

This afternoon, the First Minister and I will meet with the Taoiseach, who is in the North today and tomorrow for a number of engagements. That provides a further opportunity to ensure that we are consistently seeking to develop North/South relations in a way that is advantageous for all of us and for each of the Administrations on this island.

Mr Lyttle: Mr Speaker, I would be grateful if you were to give me half the time afforded to Dr McDonnell for his diagnosis of the problem.

Mr Speaker: It does not work that way. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the delivery of the Programme for Government for consultation and I encourage the wider community to participate in the process. As a member of a party that has stood and sacrificed for cross-community co-operation and delivery from the day and hour of its foundation, I welcome the key aim of building a shared community and the specific target of delivery of an overarching community relations strategy for the economic imperative of tackling the cost of division.

In that context, given the First Minister's expressed aim of delivering an effective and shared education system, why does the new Education and Skills Authority propose to create controlled and maintained sector support bodies but no integrated sector support body?

Mr P Robinson: I am not sure that I will answer in the context that the Member laid out. However, I appreciate his welcoming of the Programme for Government and his encouragement for people to respond to the consultation.

I recognise that there are many in this community who believe that our future is, to some extent, dependent on the extent to which we, as a community, can come together. There is no better place to do that than the school yard. Therefore, there is every encouragement in this Programme for Government for people to recognise that we have determined a direction of travel. It is not a light-switch matter where one day we can be in our present circumstances and the next be in a shared education system; it will be a step-by-step process. If, in the consultation process, the Member wants to make suggestions as to how ESA can be improved, we will listen to what he has to say.

It is a tremendous step forward. I was particularly happy to hear the endorsement that ESA was getting from people who are stakeholders in the education sector, and it is a testimony to the hard work that has gone in that so many people are supportive of where we are. There will always be detractors, and there will always be the ability to improve it, but that is what a consultation process is about.

Mr McLaughlin: I also welcome the publication of these statements today. I have a particular welcome for the explicit reference in both documents to social clauses in public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction. Will the deputy First Minister explain how social clauses will help the economy and individuals, particularly those who are unemployed?

12.00 noon

Mr M McGuinness: Many people will welcome the inclusion of social clauses in public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction. In seeking to secure the maximum social return for public expenditure, we will include social benefit clauses at every stage of the procurement process, whether for construction, services or supplies.

The use of social clauses in contracts can deliver skilling, reskilling and training opportunities, for example apprenticeships or on-the-job training; create employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed; encourage equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender, race or disability; and support SMEs and social enterprises. Of particular advantage to

the Executive is the ability to match investment in an area while taking account of the need to get local people into employment. Contracts will carry a core requirement to target the recruitment and training of local people. Such a process can, as we know, help regenerate some of our most disadvantaged communities.

By ensuring that social clauses are appropriate to the size of the contract, we will ensure that their use does not have to add to the cost of the contract. One contractor who has experience of working with contracts containing social clauses found that their use was the deciding factor in their securing additional work worth £100 million when in competition with competitors who did not have community benefit targets in their contracts. We would welcome a commitment from local councils to adopt a parallel process.

A recent example that I heard at first hand was the building of the Peace Bridge in Derry. Twelve people who previously would not have had the opportunity to gain employment or apprenticeships went into that project with the support of the contractors. I spoke to the contractors at the end of the project, on the very day that the First Minister and I were in the city to see the opening of the bridge, and they were full of praise for the young people who took up employment and have bought into the inclusion of local people in contracts in a very big way.

We ignore those benefits at our peril. I am very pleased that all parties in the Assembly are very supportive of not only continuing with this approach but intensifying it.

Mr Ross: I welcome the announcement that the Executive will eliminate air passenger duty for long-haul flights once that power is devolved. I acknowledge the work that a number of Executive Ministers have been engaged in to get that lever devolved to this Assembly. Will the First Minister explain what opportunities there are to expand the number of long-haul flights from Northern Ireland? What would the importance of that be to Northern Ireland and our economy?

Mr P Robinson: My colleague, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, is already in discussion with airlines with the expectation that she will be able to offer them a zero rate of APD for long-haul flights. That is bound to move some people over the line to where it becomes a profitable and worthwhile venture.

From the experience that the deputy First Minister and I had in the United States, I know the impact that the danger of losing the continental route was having on some of the companies that we had been dealing with who regularly use that route as a connection between their business base in the United States and their satellite in Northern Ireland. It is a vital route for us, and, if we can expand that, it will clearly be useful in attracting foreign direct investment.

It will also be very significant for tourism. I expect that Northern Ireland will become a popular entry point to the British Isles as a whole, because that will allow airlines to take advantage of our zero level of APD and become more competitive by landing at Belfast rather than anywhere else in the British Isles. There is great potential there as well. It will also, I think, open Northern Ireland up as a hub for a wider range of airline routes.

It is a good news story for Northern Ireland. We have to wait until the Westminster Government bring forward legislation to empower us. However, we have put into the Programme for Government a clear indicator of what it is our intention to do as an Executive once that power is available to us.

Mr McNarry: Question 8, Mr Speaker. My supplementary is as follows. I welcome the news of free nursery school places, as I welcome the progress on ESA and the commitments to upgrade attainments. However, the dark cloud of school closures hangs over that good news. Will the Executive commit today to an early implementation plan locked into building new schools on new sites, so that we and parents can compare what is going up and what is coming down?

Mr McGuinness: Obviously, that is an issue on which the Minister of Education will have to advise the Executive. There is a very ambitious programme, albeit against the backdrop of difficult economic circumstances, for an investment of something like £2 billion in schools in the coming years. The major decision that has now been taken to establish the Education and Skills Authority provides a real opportunity to ensure that the sort of matters that you have raised can be dealt with much more sensibly, given the previous divisions in education.

We will see a unified approach with all the attendant benefits, not just for the schools

estate and the huge challenges and the decisions that will have to be taken in that regard. Everyone in the Assembly is very supportive of the need to intensify the sharing of educational facilities and of greater interaction between schools in the time ahead. The Minister of Education will put in place an advisory group alongside the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority to advise him on how we can intensify sharing in educational establishments. All of that bodes well for the future. However, it is very much in its infancy, and we will test it over a period.

In our Programme for Government, there is no reluctance whatsoever to face headlong into the challenges before us in further improving our system of education.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the agreement of a draft Programme for Government. My question relates specifically to the commitment to establish an Education and Skills Authority, which we are told will be operational in 2013. Will the First Minister outline the timetable for implementation of the Education and Skills Authority? Secondly, I welcome the inclusion of a strategy for the Irish language under the Programme for Government priority of building a strong and shared community.

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, in asking that question, he answered it as well. The Programme for Government sets out clearly the Executive's intention to establish the Education and Skills Authority. I am delighted that we have been able to reach agreement on that issue in a way that, unlike the previous proposal, includes the transferors as part of the new structure. That is beneficial. It is welcomed by them, and the Minister is taking the proposals forward.

Consistent with the Hillsborough agreement, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure will bring forward a strategy for the Irish language and Ulster Scots. We look forward to seeing those proposals. I hope that both of those languages can be developed in a way that is apart from political rancour.

Mr Eastwood: I welcome the mention of Derry's One Plan in the Programme for Government. As the First Minister and deputy First Minister know, there are 11 catalyst projects in One Plan, ranging from Magee to the City of Culture. Can the First Minister or deputy First Minister tell me what specific resources have been allocated to deliver those projects?

Mr M McGuinness: Delivering economic, social and physical renewal in the area, in line with the One Plan mission statement, which we are committed to developing, represents huge challenges for all of us as we go forward. We also want to ensure that we bring back to use the key development sites at Ebrington and Fort George, pump-priming Ebrington to attract private investment totalling £23 million infrastructure investment over the three years completed. Hopefully, the next phase of that will be open to the public before the end of this year.

Conall McDevitt is whispering all sorts of things behind me and shaking his head. Now he is rubbing his fingers. He cannot wait for the answer. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the deputy First Minister to answer.

Mr M McGuinness: All the issues that the Member raised represent a real issue for the Executive in ensuring that there is financial support not just for the One Plan but for the success of the City of Culture. We have had discussions at the Executive and between ourselves, and there is no doubt that, as the roll-out begins, the financial commitment will be there from the Executive to ensure the success of not just the One Plan but the City of Culture.

It is hard to put a figure on it at this stage, as it is still a work in progress and Departments are still dealing with some of the bids that have come in. However, as time rolls on over the next number of weeks and the process goes out for consultation, it will become apparent before too long what the financial commitment will need to be in terms of support from the Executive to the One Plan objectives and to the success of the City of Culture.

Mr Spratt: I thank the First Minister and deputy First Minister for the statement this morning. The Programme for Government makes very positive announcements in relation to shared education. Will the First Minister set out how significant the delivery of those commitments could be in years to come?

Mr P Robinson: Effectively, there are three commitments, though they come under two bullet points in the Programme for Government. First, a ministerial-led advisory group will be

set up to look at how we might advance shared education. It will report back to the Minister, and he will report to the Executive on how we can take that forward. Secondly, there is a commitment that all schoolchildren will be given the opportunity to be part of shared education programmes. Thirdly, there is a commitment to increase the number of shared facilities. Therefore, it is hugely significant.

It is the strongest commitment ever made by any Executive or Government in Northern Ireland, a greater commitment than was given even under direct rule. It is a commitment that has legs, in that it clearly shows the direction in which we intend to travel to encourage young people not to look at those who have a different religious background as being different but to participate and to have educational experiences alongside them. We all know what goal we would like to achieve. It will be for future years to determine how fast we can get there, but it is important for Northern Ireland that we do get there.

Finally, as far as shared education is concerned, I recognise that, although people in Northern Ireland have overwhelmingly indicated in opinion polls that they are for it, some people have sensitivities around the issue and are concerned about what it might mean for them. The job of the advisory group that is being set up is to look at where the difficulties might be and at how they can be overcome so that we might move forward together. That is a very strong commitment from the Executive. They do not want to continue with the divisions that happened in the past, from the very earliest of years, when we started looking at others as being different from ourselves.

12.15 pm

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis na hAirí as a ráiteas. I thank the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their statement this morning and for the publication of the draft Programme for Government. I welcome the inclusion of the One Plan in the document. I suppose a lesson for some political figures and, indeed, commentators is that you should never base your comments on the first draft of any document. Will the Minister outline what he feels the significance of the implementation and development of the One Plan will be?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that it has huge significance for the whole of the north-west, and I think that all of us understand that a lot of work went into it. When the work began, there were about 1,000 visions of what the north-west would look like. It was vital to ensure that everybody involved in the process was involved in a way that unified them and meant that they had one vision for the future. That is clearly there in the One Plan. It represents a huge challenge not only for people in Derry but for the Executive and all Departments. As we go forward, we all recognise that, on the basis of ensuring that we take seriously our responsibilities for the projects that have been placed before us, we must move forward in a cohesive and united way to recognise that we have to ensure that we give the fullest possible support from Executive level to the implementation of the One Plan. That is especially the case because that area, particularly the Foyle constituency, has been identified in the past 24 hours as an area of huge social disadvantage due to its unacceptable unemployment levels.

The One Plan obviously has a number of very important strands, not least the development of the Fort George and Ebrington sites. The construction of the Peace Bridge has been hugely welcomed everywhere. I remember the scepticism in the north-west when the bridge was first proposed, but I am told that tens of thousands of people have travelled over that bridge in recent times. I have met friends of mine who have come from different parts of Ireland who say that standing on the bridge is like standing in any modern European city. However, they have not seen anything yet. When people see what is at the far end of the bridge, namely the development of the Ebrington site, they will see that we are putting our money where our mouth is by ensuring that we go forward in a way that shows a very serious intent to bring the vision of the people in the city to reality.

Very important in all that is the point that Colum Eastwood made about Magee university. It is hugely important that people recognise that there is a real opportunity there, particularly given the City of Culture achievement and the good implications that all that will have for the city in 2013. I see that as a period of lift-off for the city, and, as we go forward, it is important that all our Departments at Executive level recognise their duties and responsibilities in ensuring the success and implementation of the One Plan.

Mr Hamilton: I congratulate the First Minister and his colleagues on producing the Programme for Government and investment strategy. The Programme for Government contains many significant but essential public reform programmes. Is the First Minister confident that the reforms in education, local government and health will be realised in this Programme for Government period?

Mr P Robinson: I am. I see a determination and a momentum with this Executive that was much less evident in the last Executive. We have been able to reach agreement in areas that dogged our past four years. There is a determination to find resolutions to problems, rather than creating other difficulties. I am pretty sure that we can work together on the RPA, the ESA and all those issues to ensure that they are addressed within the time frame that we have set down in the Programme for Government. We have set up mechanisms to ensure that timetables are met and that, where there are difficulties, there is a process for dealing with them.

Departments were asked during the period leading up to the Executive meeting to look at each of the targets relating to their responsibilities. They were all asked to satisfy themselves that they could meet the targets that had been set out, and it is on that basis that we have set them down. There are some targets, particularly in relation to jobs and other elements, where we sought to go beyond what the Department had suggested — to stretch the Department — simply because the Department had delivered on previous occasions earlier than at the end of the four-year period. While some targets go beyond what Departments would have been comfortable with at first, I believe that the targets relating to the structural changes can and will be met.

Mr Lunn: Like others, I welcome the publication of these documents and, in particular, the reference on page 32 of the Programme for Government to the Maze/Long Kesh development. However, I have some concerns about the sequencing in the document. Is it realistic that, within a year of the launch of the development plan, the Balmoral show could be held at the Maze, particularly as the construction of the site infrastructure is scheduled to start in the same year? Beyond that, is it realistic that the peace-building and conflict resolution centre could be completed the following year, given that the private sector development partner is only to be appointed in that year?

Mr M McGuinness: Obviously, the delivery of an integrated spatial framework and delivery plan to guide the regeneration of the site by March 2012 is very important. Securing approval to commence delivery of the two initial catalyst projects and the development of the peace-building and conflict resolution centre by 2015 and agreement with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society to relocate to the site by 2013 and facilitating the development that will maximise the site's economic development and potential marketability are all huge issues. As we go forward, we are very determined to ensure that we have in place the body that will take this work forward. We have to be ambitious, and I know from our discussions with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society that it is very keen to relocate. However, there are sensitive discussions going on between our officials and the RUAS.

The conflict resolution and peace-building centre is inherent in all of that. We have made an application to Europe for vital funds that will go towards its construction, and we know that President Barroso himself is very much involved in supporting the project. When it becomes clear — hopefully, it will become clear in the coming months — that that money will be available, there will be no reason why we cannot proceed with all haste on both projects. As far as I am concerned, these are two flagship projects. We have a huge amount of land available, probably the prime development site in the whole of the island of Ireland. Progressing those two projects will be important, because, once you put what are seen as flagship projects in place, building all the rest around them is much easier.

Mr McCallister: I, too, welcome the publication of the Programme for Government. What basis does the First Minister have for so much optimism about delivering on this programme, given that little over half of the key targets of the last programme were met?

Mr P Robinson: The Member had better go back and get a better statistical analysis. The monitoring report indicates that the number of those targets that has been met is closer to two thirds than one half. The Member may be genetically incapable of being positive about such matters.

The reality is that we make targets in order to stretch people and encourage them to do

more than would otherwise be the case. As I indicated, all Departments, including the one that is led by an Ulster Unionist, have been asked to look at the targets, to be sure that they feel that they can reach them. Departments have indicated that they can. I hope that the Committees will be able to monitor during the next number of years — depending on which target it is — the performance of the Departments in doing that. We have monitoring arrangements so that the Executive will be kept up to date with what progress is being made.

The Member well knows that a number of targets could not be met over the past four years because of a worldwide recession. As targets were set before the global recession, it is, undoubtedly, the case that the recession had a major impact on Departments' ability to reach them. However, if we had not set those targets or, indeed, had not set the economy as the main plank of the previous Programme for Government, clearly, we would have been less well prepared to deal with what was to come down the road.

Mr Douglas: I also welcome of the publication of the draft Programme for Government. I welcome its ambitious job creation target. I am not sure whether my question is for the First Minister or the deputy First Minister. Can those targets be delivered given the current economic climate? How do they compare with current performance?

Mr M McGuinness: The target of 25,000 jobs will come from a variety of sources: 6,300 promoted jobs in locally owned companies, with 50% of them paying salaries that are above the private sector median; 6,500 new jobs in new start-up businesses that are supported by Invest NI; 5,900 promoted jobs from inward investors, with 75% of them paying salaries that are above the private sector median; and 6,300 promoted jobs from the jobs fund, with 4,000 of them to be created by March 2015. In particular, we will support new investments that provide job opportunities, especially for people in areas of economic disadvantage, with an emphasis on incentivising new business start-up activity by individuals in neighbourhood renewal areas and by young people in the 16 to 24 age bracket who are not in education, employment or training.

It is, absolutely, an ambitious target. It represents a real challenge to all of us in government, our Departments and, I suppose, Invest NI in particular. Many people will have heard Mark Ennis, the new chairman of Invest NI, on 'Good Morning Ulster' this morning. However, I remind people that, when Peter Robinson and I set off to the United States of America, Members from a number of political parties in the House told us that, against the backdrop of a worldwide recession and the difficulties in the US economy, we would not secure a single job. We have confounded all of them. As a result of our visits to the United States and the propositions that we have put, we have brought foreign direct investment in the form of thousands of new jobs and attracted many worldwide companies to our shores.

Look at the reinvestment by Citigroup, which has provided 500 jobs. The New York Stock Exchange established the Euronext company, which has brought 500 jobs. The First Minister mentioned our visit, just the other day, to the opening of Allen and Overy's new development. That has brought 317 new jobs. Those companies are world leaders in their field. Many people thought that we would never attract a company of the stature of HBO to the North; however, it came here. In 2010, it employed between 700 and 800 people in Belfast. This year, it is back to make a second series. That will create 700 jobs.

It is obvious that we have the ability to put in place new jobs and attract foreign direct investment. We also have the ability to put in place measures that encourage our own entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized businesses to recognise the important part that they have to play.

12.30 pm

Against the backdrop of being asked what our big attraction is, the First Minister spoke about all the things we have to offer. He articulated very clearly the huge advantages that we have, such as a highly educated workforce and people who, when they get a job, are not inclined to leave it and are very loyal to their companies. We recognise the costs that present a challenge to companies when they relocate to Belfast. However, a key element in all of this is that we have peace and people are looking to the Assembly and the Executive, which has been intact for four years. The fact that we have shown that we have the ability to work with each other in a positive and constructive way has had a major impact on potential investors.

The First Minister and I were in London in the past two weeks, meeting people from the financial

services sector, all of whom are looking at what we have to offer. In spite of the doom and gloom over the world recession and what is happening in the euro zone, there are real opportunities out there for us. We do not intend to lie down under the doom and gloom merchants. We intend to look for the opportunities. Over the past two or three years, we have shown that we can seize the opportunities and bring thousands of jobs to the North.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the publication of the long-awaited Programme for Government. I urge individuals and groups to engage in the consultation process. I welcome the First Minister's recognition that the judgement of the Assembly and particularly the Executive by the community at large will be on the basis of delivery.

We all know that the agrifood sector can provide significant economic opportunities. On page 33 of the Programme for Government there is a reference to particular aims and targets for that sector. However, does the First Minister agree that they are not particularly challenging and are largely aspirational at this stage? Would he welcome a more proactive response by the Department and the Minister to deliver and take advantage of the opportunities that that could present?

Mr P Robinson: If there is any sector that does not need encouragement, it is agrifood, which has been tremendously successful, even against the backcloth of the recession. The statistics that were provided to us at the last Executive meeting were very positive. Indeed, it was perhaps the best sector of all those we have experienced. It forms a major part of the economic strategy, so the question might well be placed before the Minister. It is a tremendously important sector for Northern Ireland, it has performed well, and there are excellent opportunities out there. I recently met a team from the Chinese embassy, and we looked at their needs, particularly in respect of pork. There are massive opportunities for us to sell to the largest market in the world. I accept the Member's comments. Perhaps when the Minister gets an opportunity during the economic strategy discussion, she will say something more about that.

Mr Copeland: With no cynicism or detraction, I welcome the publication of this consultation document, and I join the calls for people to respond to it. I believe that I am addressing the deputy First Minister. I draw his attention to page 36, which addresses fuel poverty. Will he allow me a slight observation that it is a little scant on detail at this stage? I can wait for detail. Will he give me some guidance as to the depth of discussions that surround the attack on fuel poverty that we are about to make? Can he also confirm whether the Kirklees method will be used? That method was developed in Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, it was tried twice here and was subsequently exported to England, and its use has led to three times as many houses being treated to assist in the fight against fuel poverty for the same money as the preferred option that we have adopted here.

Mr M McGuinness: As we all know, too many people are experiencing fuel poverty, and the Programme for Government will focus on tackling that issue. The Government will have a fundamental role in leading improvements and in offering advice and support in the domestic energy efficiency of the housing stock in the owner-occupied and private rented sectors. Improvements in the housing stock will increase thermal comfort in homes and will contribute to carbon reduction targets. The fact that we have made it clear that, in the course of this Programme for Government, the Housing Executive will double-glaze all of its houses, is a very clear indicator of how seriously we take this issue.

I am not familiar with the Kirklees process, but no doubt the Minister for Social Development and his predecessors are aware of it. If it is not being pursued here, and it has been such a success in England, its use needs to be considered. I have no knowledge of that process, but the Minister for Social Development is in the House, and I am sure that he has taken note of what you have said.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members, that ends questions on the first statement.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you explain to the House and the wider watching public why, on this important occasion, only Members whose parties are in the Executive were called to speak?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: Is there a fear of challenging and critical questions?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should take his seat. The Member will know and understand —

Mr Allister: No, I do not understand.

Mr Speaker: The Member will know and should understand that, under Standing Order 18A, which deals with ministerial statements, it is very clear that an hour is given for questions. I warned the House and all Members to be focused, so that we could get in as many Members as possible, and out of the 30-odd Members who wanted to speak, 18 got in. Members need to learn the lesson — the lesson is very clear — and be focused when asking questions on ministerial statements. That is the issue for the House.

I have no discretion to extend the time allowed for questions after a ministerial statement, and perhaps Members need to look at that issue in the Standing Orders. I understand that the Member is a member of the Committee on Procedures, and maybe that is an issue that he and the Committee should look at.

We really need to move on, and I must say to the Member that that was not a point of order. I have no discretion when it comes to ministerial statements, nor, as I said to the Member, have I any discretion to extend the time for questions.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Perhaps, Mr Speaker, if someone — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* The Member should take his seat. *[Interruption.]* Let me say to the Member that, if he is not careful, he may not get in for a question on the second statement.

Mr Allister: Don't embarrass —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should be careful. He is almost coming to the point where he is challenging the authority of the Chair. He should not go there.

Mr McCallister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wanted to draw your attention to the First Minister's reply to me when he questioned my genetic make-up — *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should take his seat. That is not a point of order; let us move on to the second statement.

Ministerial Statement: Economic Strategy

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): This is an important day for the Executive and the Assembly as we launch the draft Programme for Government, draft investment strategy and draft economic strategy. It is also important for the people of Northern Ireland, as the Executive are issuing those documents today to set out what we are planning to do in the face of some very difficult challenges.

I am very pleased to present the economic strategy to this Assembly. Economic recovery is a central theme flowing through the three documents. A vibrant economy can transform our society and reduce the deprivation and poverty which blights many of our communities. We face a real challenge in growing the economy, not least as the effects of the recent and deep recession will be felt for some time, but I believe that we can meet the challenge, and the strategy sets out what the Executive plan to do over the short, medium and longer term.

We also place a concerted emphasis on implementation. To that end, we will shortly publish a comprehensive action plan, and I assure members today that performance will be tracked and regularly updated against our proposed performance indicators. As I said, we face a very difficult economic climate. Growth across much of the world remains slow and uncertain. Even major economies, such as the United States, face severe problems. The euro zone is also struggling, and we need to recognise the impact that that has on businesses in Northern Ireland. Our labour market continues to face the brunt of the economic downturn. Published yesterday, the most recent labour market statistics indicated that the unemployment rate for the period from July to September was 7·3% — unchanged over the quarter, but up 0·3% over the year.

However, as recognised in the draft economic strategy, our unemployment rate remains lower than that in the rest of the United Kingdom and the European Union average and is considerably lower than the Republic of Ireland's. That doesn't make me complacent. Unemployment is much more than a statistic, for it represents people who have lost a major source of their income. We also have a large number of young people who are unemployed or economically

inactive, and that is a challenge for all us policymakers. Inflation is another problem. Rising costs, particularly in areas such as imported energy, are causing real problems for both individuals and companies.

In recognising the contemporary challenges we face, this draft strategy seeks to address some long-standing issues. They include the need to increase our living standards to levels enjoyed elsewhere in the UK and beyond; the need to rebalance our economy towards greater and more value-added private sector growth, particularly faced with the pressures on consumer and public expenditure; the need to provide support for company development in Northern Ireland in the context of revised EU guidelines, which might reduce levels of assistance; and the need to reduce the levels of poverty and joblessness in the economy.

Those are real and significant challenges, but the draft strategy outlines why we should have optimism and confidence for the future. For example, we have a younger population than the average in the UK and the European Union. We have many local companies which are entering export markets with new and innovative products. We have a skills system that is increasingly focused on the needs of industry, and we continue to outperform the rest of the UK on GCSE and A-level results. We also have many sectors, not least agrifood, which have proved resilient in the downturn. Those are only a few of our strengths, but I recognise the need to harness them and others in order to reach our stated vision for 2030, which is:

> *"To have an economy characterised by a sustainable and growing private sector, where a greater number of firms compete in global markets and there is growing employment and prosperity."*

The draft economic strategy sets out a road map to that destination, but, before I highlight some of the key issues, I want to say a few words about the process that I have put in place to get us to where we are today. In December 2008, I commissioned an independent review of economic policy. I asked the panel to advise me on what was needed to realign existing policies and devise new policies to help grow our economy. I received a report from the panel some nine months later, in September 2009. That report was comprehensive and provided a thorough analysis of our economy and economic policies.

The panel made a large number of recommendations, and I advised the House in January last year that I was minded to accept virtually all of them. A programme was put in place to ensure that those recommendations were implemented, and, earlier this year, I provided the Assembly with an update on progress. The panel recommended that we should set up a permanent subcommittee of the Executive, which I would chair, to prioritise action on the economy. We have done that.

The panel recommended increased autonomy for Invest NI and for the organisation to be more flexible and responsive to the entire business base in order to prioritise action in the key areas of innovation, research and development, and exports. We have done that. However, we will continue to work to ensure that businesses are given flexible solutions to meet their business needs. The panel recommended that the committee should agree an economic strategy, building on its report. We have also done that, and I am presenting that draft strategy to the Assembly today.

12.45 pm

I have chaired a number of meetings of the economic subcommittee of the Executive, and together we have assessed the challenges we face and the actions we should take. Membership of the committee includes those Departments that have a key interest in economic development. However, in drawing up the strategy, all Departments have been involved. We have carried out extensive research into what works for other small open economies, and it was clear from that work that there is no silver bullet or magic formula to give us overnight success. However, what was highlighted was the twin emphasis on growing the private sector through sustained emphasis on innovation, and research and development. The importance, for some, of a policy lever such as corporation tax was very clear, and I will return to that point later in my statement.

We have used that work to produce a framework for economic growth. In January, I launched the first phase of the consultation on the strategy, built around the framework and the core priority to drive export-led growth. To do so, I proposed that we needed to rebuild and rebalance the local economy. I invited all stakeholders to consider the draft framework and our associated objectives. I was very encouraged by the degree

of engagement and the positive response. That has enabled the Executive subcommittee to build on that initial consultation document and to produce the strategy that I am presenting to the Assembly today.

One of the other recommendations from the review of economic policy was that, as Minister for the economy, I should seek expert economic advice. I have set up a small group, known as the Economic Advisory Group (EAG), chaired by Kate Barker. Kate has brought a wealth of experience and knowledge, and I pay tribute to her and her group for the advice that they have provided. They have helped to shape the strategy and, during the summer, the EAG met the Executive subcommittee on the economy to discuss key issues.

The overarching aim of the strategy is to improve the economic competitiveness of our local economy, mainly through export-led economic growth. That reflects the reality that we are not large enough to rely solely on domestic markets and that we need to export if we are to grow and to create wealth and employment. However, an important message in the draft strategy is that we need to not just deepen our export base but diversify into countries and markets that are showing growth potential. That is why I welcome the PricewaterhouseCoopers report published this week. It stated:

> *"the best potential area for growing the economy was to raise the share of Northern Ireland exports focussed on developing economies".*

In the earlier consultation on the framework for growth, we proposed that the strategy should be built around the twin goals of rebalancing and rebuilding the economy. That received widespread support, and the draft strategy is, therefore, built on those themes. We need to rebalance the economy towards higher value added private sector activity. We also need a stronger private sector in line with our competitors, such as the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. In stating that, let me be clear that I am not diminishing the value of the public sector. Here in Northern Ireland, we need strong public services, not least because of our relatively high levels of poverty and deprivation. However, our public sector needs to be as efficient as possible. That is why the draft Programme for Government highlights some of the public sector reforms necessary to support overall growth in the economy.

The draft economic strategy is about ensuring that we have a stronger private sector: a private sector that creates wealth and employment. That will not be achieved overnight, which is why we are setting out the draft strategy with a 2030 vision. However, let me be clear: unlike previous strategies, we will not allow this one to simply gather dust. We will keep it under review, and an updated version, including a detailed list of actions and targets for the post 2014-15 period, will be produced when the outcome of the UK Government's next spending review is known.

We have also prioritised the areas where we believe the greatest potential for competiveness and exports exist. I am grateful for the work of MATRIX, which has identified those areas in the manufacturing sector that have the greatest potential for growth. As part of keeping this strategy under review, we will target our resources where the best opportunities arise across the globe.

I have spoken about the economic challenges that we and, indeed, many other western countries face. I now want to return to the actions and steps that we are taking to build confidence into the local economy. In support of the twin objectives of rebalancing and rebuilding, we have set out a number of strategic themes. On rebalancing, we have five such themes, the first of which is to stimulate innovation, research and development, and creativity.

A couple of weeks ago, I visited Wrightbus with the Mayor of London to see the roll-out of a new bus for London. That is an example of innovation. The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, said that the bus:

> *"showcases the very best of British manufacturing and design".*

He also said:

> *"This is a world-class piece of technology built here in Ballymena. It's the most amazing futuristic design, but it's also the cleanest, greenest bus".*

[Interruption.] Green in the right way. *[Laughter.]* I look forward to the new bus being not just on the streets of London but in capital cities throughout the world.

As I visit many companies, I am very conscious of the new ideas that are springing up,

especially from young people. I have visited the Northern Ireland Science Park, which has had great success in developing high-technology companies. It continues to expand, and I hope that its planned venture in Londonderry is successful. We need to foster and encourage that sort of activity, and we are proposing to invest significantly in that area to build the knowledge economy necessary to support wealth and employment.

Our second theme is based on skills. Above all, our most important asset is our people. As I mentioned earlier in my statement, we are very fortunate that we have a very young population here. We need to provide them with relevant skills, and we need to give companies that are considering investing here the confidence that they will find a skilled, motivated and energetic workforce. We also need to provide people who find themselves out of work with the necessary opportunities to retrain and get new skills.

The strategy is built around economic growth. However, the economy will grow only if firms grow, and the third theme is about encouraging business growth. We have many good firms in Northern Ireland but most are small and medium-sized, and we want to help them to expand. Unfortunately, there is sometimes reluctance, especially in family-owned businesses, to grasp the opportunities that might be open, and we want to help. In saying that, I recognise that there is a major difficulty in the current climate of getting bank finance. I wish that I could solve that, but we have to be realistic. We are looking at areas where we can offer further help, and we have proposed some initiatives in the draft strategy to help with that.

The fourth theme is competing in a global economy. We want to encourage local companies to expand their horizons. If they have not already exported, we want to help and encourage them to do so, and we want to encourage those who have exported to enter new and growing markets. The draft strategy and, indeed, our review of global best practice have confirmed that there is a very close link between exports and attracting foreign direct investment. Therefore, in launching an export-led economic growth strategy, we need to attract further and better foreign direct investment into Northern Ireland and to ensure that those companies become embedded in the local economy through supply chain and other linkages. That is why we, as an Executive, have called for the powers to vary the rate of corporation tax to support our work in attracting foreign direct investment. I will touch on that specific point shortly.

The final rebalancing theme is developing economic infrastructure. We have invested heavily in infrastructure in recent years, and that can be seen in the many new schools, roads and hospitals that have been built. However, it is not only about physical infrastructure. We need to further improve our telecoms, energy and wider infrastructure as well, and the investment strategy that has been published today shows what we are planning to do with the resources available to us.

Those are the five key strategic themes that, built on our research, we consider will help us to rebalance the economy.

The draft strategy contains various actions and investments that the Executive will resolutely deliver. Those actions are not only for my Department, because the strategy has been developed by the Executive subcommittee on behalf of, and has been endorsed by, the full Executive. However, if we are to be successful, all Departments will have to contribute and work in partnership with the private sector, the voluntary and community sectors and other economic stakeholders. We all have a part to play.

Over the past year, there has been much discussion about the desirability of using corporation tax as a policy lever. We are clear on the benefits that it could deliver, and the Executive have asked for those powers to be devolved to the Assembly and the Executive in a timely and affordable manner. We have been encouraged by the steps that the United Kingdom Government have taken already, particularly on air passenger duty. However, following the recent HM Treasury consultation on rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy, we believe that the time is now right for corporation tax powers to be devolved. The draft Programme for Government contains a commitment to press for those powers so that we can reduce the level in Northern Ireland.

The draft economic strategy also anticipates a successful outcome to the ongoing negotiations with the UK Government. That is because we recognise that it would have the most transformative impact on the economy and would help to strengthen our economic competitiveness. Equally, we recognise that it

would not, by itself, be sufficient to stimulate the wealth and employment that we need. In parallel, we must work to grow the private sector, and I believe that the actions outlined in the draft strategy will help to strengthen our economic competitiveness, irrespective of the outcome on corporation tax.

In the strategy, we have set ourselves some challenging targets on increasing exports and attracting investment. Investment in research and development is vital to a sustainable recovery, and we aim to support £300 million of investment by businesses in R&D and to support 500 businesses to undertake R&D for the first time. I mentioned the importance of skills and employability, so we will increase to 70% the proportion of young people leaving school having achieved at least 5 GCSEs at A* to C, including English and maths. To encourage our local businesses to grow, we will enable 300 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to access funding through Invest Northern Ireland's access-to-capital strategy, including a £50 million loan fund for small and medium-sized enterprises. We will also support £330 million of investment in local businesses and support 160 social economy start-ups.

In line with our focus on export-led growth, we will increase manufacturing exports by 15% by 2015. We will also secure investment of £300 million by establishing and growing externally owned companies. At the same time, we will encourage first-time exporters by promoting 60 start-ups selling to markets outside the United Kingdom and 440 new start-ups selling to GB. In particular, we want to support the promotion of 25,000 jobs over the lifetime of the new Programme for Government. That will make a very real impact. Those actions will help us to rebalance the economy.

The other goal in the strategy is rebuilding, and we have set out two further themes on that. The first theme is about promoting accessible employment opportunities across all areas and communities in Northern Ireland, and the second is about providing training and reskilling to those who are unemployed or inactive because of the downturn. We want to address the wider barriers to employment so that people do not become detached from the labour market. Again, the draft strategy contains various actions to help rebuild the economy in the aftermath of the recession. In working to rebuild the economy, we will move 114,000 working age benefit clients into employment by March 2015. We will help the construction industry by upgrading our roads and by delivering approximately 8,000 social and affordable homes over the next four years, and we will stimulate 1,150 new employment opportunities in rural areas by 2015 under the rural development fund.

Developing the draft strategy, which I am launching today, has not been just an academic exercise. It is a document that contains extensive actions and commitments. However, we are already working hard to rebuild and rebalance our economy. We do not have to wait another 20 years, although it may be that length of time before we achieve all our goals.

1.00 pm

Earlier this month, I also launched Invest Northern Ireland's Boosting Business initiative. That is a package of new and revamped measures aimed at boosting support to Invest Northern Ireland's existing clients and, importantly, the broader business base. As part of that, the jobs fund, which was launched in the last Budget, has a budget of £19 million to help businesses to create immediate job opportunities. I am pleased that already we have seen companies make use of that initiative, and I am very encouraged by the level of interest being shown.

At the end of October, Invest Northern Ireland had 30 offers of support for selective financial assistance under the jobs fund. Recently, I announced a project by Capita Life and Pensions that will result in 336 jobs. That is an inward investment project, the largest to date under the jobs fund. Equally, local companies are using the fund. Recent examples include Creative Composites in Lisburn and Fresh Food Kitchen and One Stop Data in Londonderry.

With my Executive colleagues, I want to do all that I can now to aid local businesses, especially as they face the current economic difficulties. As I mentioned, the agrifood industry has continued to be successful, with increases in output, exports and employment. We continue to work with that important sector and are putting in place a food strategy board so that we can engage with it better.

Last month, I visited Kurdistan with Invest Northern Ireland and 20 local firms. I was greatly encouraged by the positive response,

and the clear message is that there are opportunities in Kurdistan for companies that want to do business there. We have identified areas for potential co-operation, which we intend to develop over the months ahead. That is just one country. There are many others.

Just last week, I announced the highest ever expenditure by businesses on research and development. Despite the current economic difficulties, local firms recognise that continuing to invest in new products and processes will give them greater competitive advantage in markets where there are still opportunities for growth.

The tourism sector is also very important for us and offers many opportunities over the next few years. I am delighted by the success of the recent MTV Europe Music Awards and am pleased with the way in which Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board were able to work with a wide range of stakeholders in the public and private sectors to make that event such a stunning success. It showcased Belfast and Northern Ireland in a very positive manner to a huge audience across the world. I congratulate everyone who was involved.

That is just the start of what will be a very exciting couple of years. We recently launched NI 2012: Our Time, Our Place. That is an exciting programme of events, celebrations and commemorations commencing with the Titanic festival next April. That will continue throughout next year, leading to the UK City of Culture celebrations in 2013. We want to see a significant increase in tourist numbers and expenditure, which offers an immediate positive impact on the economy.

Today, I am also launching a tourist development scheme through a targeted call process. It will offer assistance to capital projects and is focused on the themes of culture and heritage, food, music and gardens, large-scale conferences, and events infrastructure. Those will be supported in nine key tourism destination areas across Northern Ireland.

As I indicated, I was pleased that recently we were able to reach agreement with Her Majesty's Treasury about reducing the rate of air passenger duty on long-haul flights. Access is vital to us, not just for tourism but for business. I hope that all that we are doing will bring more tourists here and so create more jobs.

I assure the House that we are very active on a wide range of fronts in addressing the economic challenges that we face. The launch of this draft economic strategy is an important milestone. However, I look forward to engaging in an extensive programme of consultation over the coming weeks to ensure that we have the right mix of actions and initiatives to deliver growth, prosperity and employment.

I have already emphasised the importance of implementation and the need to keep the strategy under regular review. I am confident that if we all work in partnership — within the Executive and across the various economic stakeholders — we will be able to make the necessary changes to strengthen our economic competitiveness.

I am pleased to bring the draft strategy to the House today. It has taken time to prepare, but we wanted to ensure that it was based on research and would address the issues that we face. We also wanted to take on board the many helpful comments that we received from the previous consultation. We need to rebalance and rebuild the economy, and the strategy sets out a framework and actions that will enable us to do so.

Mr A Maginness (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I thank the Minister for her very detailed statement. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome the economic strategy. The Committee needs time to examine the strategy in detail and to comment on it in detail. However, in September 2009, the Committee welcomed the Barnett report from which the strategy arises. The Committee will continue to be supportive where it is important to support the development of the economy.

I will make some observations. Although the Minister referred to greening Ballymena in her statement, which I support, and which, I am sure, Mr Frew supports, there is very little reference to the green economy. That needs to be addressed by the Minister and I hope that she will do so in answer to my question.

The target of creating 25,000 jobs over the next four years is ambitious. I do not doubt that the strategy should be properly ambitious but there has to be realism in it. I would like the Minister to identify how she thinks that could be achieved. The Minister also said that more than 114,000 benefit clients could move

into employment by March 2015. That is an extraordinary target and I ask the Minister to comment on it. Finally, the Minister also referred to an action plan. I wish the Minister well in developing that action plan after the process of consultation but will it be clearly targeted and focused so that we are not engaged in process but in measuring outputs?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Chair for his welcome of the strategy. He is right to point out that it is an outcome of the independent review of economic policy that started in 2008. It is important that we thank Richard Barnett and his team for starting the process and for bringing us to where we are today.

I do not think that I said that I was in the business of greening Ballymena; I said that I was very proud that the bus was one of the greenest available. If the Member looks at page 12 of the strategy, he will see the prioritisation given to the various areas. We have been informed by the MATRIX panel, which is the industry science panel that has been helping us to develop our priorities. The Member will see the number of priorities but if he looks at paragraph 1.16, he will see that it also states:

> *"In addition, MATRIX is currently conducting further analysis into the market opportunities presented by the sustainable energy sector. We will also support local businesses to fully exploit the wider potential created through the emerging green economy."*

Therefore it is in the economic strategy and will be developed over the coming years. We are delighted to see the movements that have been made, particularly in relation to DONG down in Belfast harbour. I think that that will act as a catalyst for others looking to Northern Ireland.

The Member is right: creating 25,000 jobs is a very challenging target. Our Department is the victim, as the First Minister would say, of hitting our targets the last time round and the need to stretch ourselves on this occasion. It is absolutely incredible that Invest Northern Ireland was able to hit all those targets, given the difficult times that we were in. Therefore, it was felt that there was a need to try to stretch the target the next time round. The target is 25,000 jobs, which has been broken down into various areas, including foreign direct investment, new job starts and the jobs fund, which will work alongside the other measures during the period of this Programme for Government.

The Chairperson of the Committee commented on the 114,000 jobs target. He will understand that that target reflects the work of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and that it sits with that Department. That is why the action plan will be so critical moving forward. The action plan will allot all those different targets to their particular Departments and charge them with taking them forward. Obviously, those are not new jobs but they will be programmes brought forward by DEL to deal with the impending welfare reform.

I hope that I have addressed all the issues that the Chairperson raised.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for her statement and welcome the publication of the economic strategy. Given my background, the Minister will not be surprised that I welcome the fact that the document is quite private sector friendly. I want to ask her specifically about the Boosting Business initiative. Will she elaborate on that and, perhaps, comment on how successful the jobs fund has been thus far and how she sees that benefiting the plan to boost business?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his comments about private sector growth. That is in the context of everything happening in the economy at present. In response to ongoing challenges facing businesses across Northern Ireland, Invest Northern Ireland has reviewed all its existing products and services to determine whether they can be made available to, or indeed, more easily accessed by the wider business base. We recognise that small and medium-sized businesses do not have the time for all the complicated form-filling that is sometimes required. Therefore, we are trying to make things easier and a lot more flexible for the wider business base.

All those actions have been brought together under the Boosting Business initiative, which comprises five themes: jobs, exports, research and development, technology and skills. Support from Invest Northern Ireland will be available through a combination of advice and guidance, regional seminars and workshops and, of course, financial support. I will write to all Members in the next few days to alert them to the initiative's website and free-phone number. If Members are speaking proactively to members of their local business communities or have constituents who raise issues with them,

they can advise those people to go online to see the range of advice that is available. Importantly, the new free-phone number will be answered by Invest Northern Ireland staff who are aware of all the different programmes available.

The jobs fund was launched on 1 April 2011, and since then, there has been a high level of engagement with businesses and key stakeholders. To date, we have announced 400 new jobs, and there are projects intended to create a further 1,300 new jobs. Those have been approved through Invest Northern Ireland and will be announced in due course in conjunction with the various firms. I have been pleased and encouraged to note the geographical spread of those jobs, which is critical at this time, because we know that jobs have been lost across Northern Ireland.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the launch of the economic strategy. It contains many very important initiatives and commitments. The Minister will not be surprised that I will briefly address the issue of rural businesses, which are at a major economic competitive disadvantage because of poor broadband provision. I ask the Minister to detail the strategy of her Department and the Executive for sorting that out.

1.15 pm

Mrs Foster: I will certainly respond to the Member's question. I am smiling because he asked me to outline what the Executive are doing and it is not so long ago that we were in the House and I did exactly that. It has not changed, Barry; we are still being very proactive in the whole area of broadband, whether it is fibre to the cabinet or through Avanti Communications or North West Electronics. We are trying to find solutions to very difficult problems in rural areas.

The Member knows that telecommunications is a reserved matter. We can enter the field only when there is market failure. We have certainly been doing that; we have spent a very large amount of government resources on broadband. Indeed, as he will know from the debate in the House earlier this week, we are moving into the area of mobile phone coverage, which is becoming more and more of an issue. There are Programme for Government targets for mobile phone coverage so that we ensure that people get coverage when they download from mobile handsets. He is aware of that; it is like asking the question if you know the answer. Barry knows the answer, but I am happy enough to give it again.

Mr Nesbitt: I welcome the publication of the draft strategy and I wish the Minister well in trying to achieve the targets that are contained therein. Is the employment target breakdown 5,900 for FDI, 6,500 for new start-ups, 6,300 for new jobs in locally owned companies and 6,300 from the jobs fund? If that is the case, given that those are concentric circles rather than mutually exclusive groups, what steps will she take to ensure that there is no double counting? Furthermore, will she expand on the move to bring 114,000 working-age benefit clients into employment and on whether employment also means employment schemes, such as internships and Steps to Work?

Mrs Foster: Forgive me if I repeat his targets but I did not catch them all. The 25,000 jobs target is 6,300 promoted jobs in locally owned companies, with 50% paying salaries above the private sector median; 6,500 new jobs in the new start-up business scheme, supported by Invest Northern Ireland; 5,900 jobs promoted from inward investors, with 75% paying salaries above the private sector median; and 6,300 promoted from the jobs fund, 4,000 of which are to be created by March 2015. I am not sure whether those are exactly the same targets as his but they are the targets that we and Invest Northern Ireland will work to.

There will be no double counting, but I am very hopeful that there will be other jobs that are not accounted for in those targets, including in the tourism sector. They have not been counted in those targets. There will be a ripple effect, and we will see more jobs being created, particularly in that sector.

As for bringing the 114,000 working-age benefit clients into employment by March 2015, as I said, that is not 114,000 jobs being created. Rather, it reflects the work of DEL and its employment service in ensuring that people have the skills that are necessary to take up job opportunities. I am sure that the schemes that he mentioned will very much be part of that.

Mr Lunn: I welcome the document, its optimistic tone and the Minister's statement. My question is on the same theme as Members who spoke previously. Is the Minister satisfied that the short- to medium-term rebuilding measures that

are listed are sufficiently focused on permanent full-time jobs as opposed to part-time employment opportunities or training schemes? In particular, is she satisfied that there is enough emphasis on help for the construction industry? It is well known that with the multiplier effect, every pound that is invested produces £2·84 of benefit. Is the Minister satisfied on both those counts?

Mrs Foster: In relation to the first point — increasing the number of jobs and the 114,000 jobs — the strength of the strategy is the fact that it is not just mine but sits right across government. Therefore, there are targets in it that belong to the Department for Employment and Learning and others that belong to the Department of Education, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department for Regional Development. That is why the action plan will become critical for this document. We believe very much that the Boosting Business initiative by Invest Northern Ireland is about creating real and sustainable jobs. I must say to the Member that any job is worth having at this time. He will reflect that as well.

In relation to the construction industry, the Member will see in the short- to medium-term rebuilding measures on page 13 that we put help for the construction industry in that box because we know how much the industry is hurting. The figure from the Department for Social Development in relation to 8,000 social and affordable homes will be a real and meaningful target for the construction industry. There are also key roads projects. There will be maintenance of schools, and the development, through the Department for Social Development, of the plan for double-glazing all Housing Executive homes will be a very welcome project for the construction industry as well.

We have tried to reflect on all the different sectors that we serve and how we can help and assist them to move forward. The fact that we have taken a cross-governmental approach to that means that we can do it in a more meaningful way.

Mr Moutray: Like others, I welcome this strategy. Relative to the UK average, we have a higher proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which, due to their size, tend to be more reliant on bank lending as a source of finance. Will the Minister indicate what is in the strategy to help businesses to access finance more easily in these challenging times?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. It is a theme that we return to time and again. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency statistics that came out recently pointed to the fact that in 2007, SMEs got 95% of their funding from banks, whereas by 2010, that figure had gone down to 65%. That is a very significant fall back. It is around the UK average but it is slightly more marked in Northern Ireland and will not come as a surprise to many in the Chamber.

Many have suffered market failure, particularly in the micro-financing, debt finance, venture capital, technology transfer and business angel funding markets. The figure of 95% of SMEs getting their money from a bank points to a very conservative approach to looking for finance in Northern Ireland. As a result, we have suffered disproportionately because Northern Ireland does not have a well-developed venture capital market. As such, Invest NI has had to intervene in the markets.

We will try to address the market failure and increase access to finance through a number of programmes, a few of which already exist. The newest programme, to be launched in the near future, is the growth loan fund, which seeks to help small and medium-sized businesses that want to grow but are having difficulty finding finance. Invest Northern Ireland and I will make an announcement on that matter in the near future.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Health Committee, I welcome the economic strategy. We all know that levels of deprivation are closely linked to poor health outcomes for our people. Therefore, I ask the Minister what discussions she has had with the Minister of Health in formulating the strategy so that efforts are put into job creation in areas where there are high rates of ill health, so that we can begin to tackle the health inequalities that exist in society?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. She is right to point out the circular relationship that exists, particularly between mental health and unemployment and all the issues that surround that. I have had conversations with the Health Minister, as you would expect me to, on those issues.

Part of the Boosting Business campaign and the jobs fund is targeting neighbourhood renewal areas so that people who live in those areas can be better assisted and incentivised to start their own business. If you live in a neighbourhood renewal area but do not necessarily want to start your business in a neighbourhood renewal area, you will be incentivised to the tune of £1,000 and we will try and assist through all the other mechanisms that Invest Northern Ireland has available.

Obviously, young people are the other group that we feel needs to be incentivised through the jobs fund to start up their own businesses. Again, there is an incentive of £1,500 in the Boosting Business scheme to try to encourage young people to start their own businesses, with all the advice and guidance that we have for them.

Mr Newton: I join others in welcoming the statement by the Minister and thank her for it. Like others, I agree that there was a very optimistic tone in the statement.

The Minister recognises the importance of research and development and I note her comments in the report. How will the strategy that she is outlining today help us to take research and development to a stronger level in the various companies in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question on research and development. I know that he has a particular interest in that field. I thank him and the rest of the Enterprise Committee for the work that they are doing in that area.

Research and development is hugely important for us in the economic circumstances that we find ourselves because the firms that have invested in research and development are the firms that are moving forward, are growing and are able to export their products in a meaningful way. It is critical for an export-led growth strategy to have that research and development behind it.

In recent years, we have experienced an increase in expenditure, particularly business expenditure, on research and development, so much so that last year, we had £344 million spent on research and development, which was the highest figure on record. We come from a lower base than the rest of the UK, but I was very pleased, given the economic circumstances that we found ourselves in, that research and development has been placed high on the agenda of so many of our companies.

There is so much more that we can do to assist, which is why one of the five themes in the Boosting Business initiative is research and development. How can we encourage smaller companies in particular? We know that the smaller companies find it more difficult to engage in research and development — it is a very new concept for them — and, often, in order to access the finance available for research and development, there is a lot of bureaucracy that they have to go through. So, we need to be proactive with those firms and that is what we intend to do through the Boosting Business initiative.

Mr Cree: Like colleagues, I thank the Minister for her statement. I appreciate the amount of work that has gone into it. The Minister has quite rightly highlighted the importance of corporation tax, and like the Programme for Government, she refers to the commitment to press for the devolution of corporation tax and to reduce its level. Given that there are no milestones or outputs outlined for the year 2014-15, when does the Minister expect that to be achieved and how much does she want the tax to be reduced to?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. In response to his last point, I would like the rate to be as low as we could make it to make us even more economically competitive than our next-door neighbour. I would like it to be as low as 10%. However, there is still a lot of work that needs to be carried out on the corporation tax issue.

As I said in my speech, we believe the time is now right to devolve the powers for corporation tax. We remain very much committed to utilising those powers to the best advantage of our economy. We continue to work with the NIO and Whitehall Ministers to address the issues connected with devolving corporation tax-setting powers to Northern Ireland. The first meeting of the new joint ministerial working group is planned to take place on 15 December, and you can be assured that all the Ministers from Northern Ireland will be giving their best attention to that issue.

1.30 pm

Dr McDonnell: I welcome the statement and thank the Minister for her efforts, not just on this document but in her Department. It is very important that we keep up our efforts.

I reassure her that the SDLP, too, is keen to rebuild and rebalance the economy.

The Minister mentioned R&D on a number of occasions, and my colleague raised it as well. It seems to me that many of our companies are R&D-averse. They are intimidated by the implications or the work involved. The Minister did not mention the vast potential for funding that exists in the European context through framework programmes 7 and 8. Our participation in and drawdown of those programmes is very poor. Does the Minister have any ideas as to what we might do over the next couple of years to get some participation in that?

I will quickly mention the key roads projects, transport corridors and travel times being reduced: can the Minister tell us whether that includes the A5?

Mrs Foster: That is very mischievous of you. I had hoped that Members would implicitly infer that I was referring to Europe in relation to the bureaucracy around research and development. The Member is aware that that issue was the main focus of discussion when we met Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. She recognises that there are hurdles in front of small businesses that try to access research and development money from Europe.

The Boosting Business initiative has already implemented an enhanced R&D open call for small businesses — those with fewer than 50 employees — and we are also having a market-driven research and development open call for small and medium-sized businesses. Those two elements are scheduled to be announced in the near future. That does not take away from the huge amount of money available to us from Europe.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister met both President Barroso and Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn on the issue. It is about the cross-cutting nature of this issue and trying to get everyone to underline the message when they speak to Europe that, in order for us to encourage small and medium-sized businesses, there needs to be a change in the bureaucracy around the issue. We also need to proactively help companies that want to pursue research and development.

As regards travel times, this has come to me from the Department for Regional Development. I think the Programme for Government or our document — it is this document; I am getting confused between the Programme for Government and the economic strategy — makes reference to the A5 and the A8 as future examples of road projects that will help the construction industry. It is right that we look across government for opportunities to assist that sector at this time.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I am minded to ask a question about Wrightbus of Ballymena, which is right in the heart of north Antrim. It is great to see Members for North Belfast looking up to north Antrim for best business practice, but I will resist at this point.

Instead I will ask about the important sector of agrifoods. That sector has performed remarkably well in the current economic climate but has obvious opportunities to do even better in the context of food production and the risk to food security. Will the Minister assure the House that, in its worthy pursuit of foreign direct investment, her Department will work aggressively and positively to help businesses, including SMEs, in the agrifood sector in a constructive and positive way to grow and expand in the future?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question and assure him that, through my involvement with that sector over the past four years, I recognise its importance to Northern Ireland. Page 25 of the economic strategy lists one of our strengths as:

> *"A resilient indigenous agri-food sector which has continued to perform strongly throughout the recession".*

Not only is it a strength of our economy at present, but the last external opportunity mentioned in the strategy is strengthening the global demand for agrifood. The agrifood sector presents us with great global opportunities for export in coming years.

The Member will know, because of his position as Chair of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I hope to appoint a chairman to the food strategy board soon so that we can take forward this important work. We continue to support the agrifood sector. I assure him that I, as the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, will personally support the agrifood sector. I have said many

times that it is a bright shining light for the economy, and I will continue to support it.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for her statement. She highlighted the MTV awards and 'Our Time, Our Place — Northern Ireland 2012'. Will she outline how the economic strategy will further assist Northern Ireland in capitalising on cultural tourism?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. Culture and heritage are, of course, very much part of the reason why a lot of visitors come to Northern Ireland at various times of the year. They come here to enjoy themselves and take part in our local culture and heritage.

Tourism has been quite resilient despite the global downturn. It has been sustainable in times of recession. During the last economic downturn, the construction industry shrank by 16·6%, and manufacturing fell by 8%. However, tourism was relatively insulated, with a restriction of just 1·7%. Over the next 10 years, the total economic contribution of the visitor economy is set to expand faster than retail, transport and manufacturing. At the moment, it provides 5% of the economy and employs 40,000 people, which is 5·6% of our workforce.

Importantly, if 2012 is the success that, I believe, it can and should be, it will bring not only great global recognition and promotion of Northern Ireland as a good place for people to visit but jobs to Northern Ireland. Those will be sustainable jobs, because the tourism industry will continue to grow when this place is as peaceful and sustainable as it is.

Ms Lo: I, too, welcome the Minister's economic strategy. She mentioned the green economy, which has huge potential for growth in Northern Ireland given our natural resources of wind and waves. Has the Minister set a target for job creation in the green economy? How will she help the renewable energy industry to achieve that job creation?

Mrs Foster: As I said to the Chair of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, work on the renewable sector continues. MATRIX is further considering analysis of the market opportunities for us in that sector. The Member will know that the strategic energy framework has been set. It sets us challenging targets for the level of renewable energy over the coming years. Therefore, we need to be very proactive in that sector. It is against that background that I take her comments about job creation.

I do not have a specific target, because I am waiting for MATRIX's analysis of the sector. In any event, although the jobs that will, undoubtedly, be created on the renewable energy side will be welcome, the more important thing from the point of view of the strategic energy framework is that we strive to realise the targets set for us.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for her statement and the launch of her strategy, in which she refers to the need for economic growth, increased exports and improved transport infrastructure.

Does the Minister agree that it is vital that we prioritise any transport investment so that it removes bottlenecks, particularly on our strategic routes, and the associated costs to industry that result from that; that we ensure that any European funds that we can acquire for our Trans-European Network will be added to our investment; and that any public sector investment occurs in a timely fashion so that the risk of money being returned to the Chancellor is minimised?

Mrs Foster: I am not sure whether that is a question for me; it is probably a question for the Member's colleague, the Minister for Regional Development. Nevertheless, economic infrastructure is critical for Northern Ireland, and it means that we need better road and rail infrastructure.

In answer to Mr McElduff, who is no longer with us *[Laughter]* — he has left the Chamber — I say that, in relation to telecommunications, broadband and all those issues, we need to have the right and proper infrastructure in place. We do not want to have to return money to the Treasury. We want to be able to spend all the capital money in Northern Ireland to make a difference to the construction sector, which we have spent a lot of time speaking about this morning.

Mr Hamilton: I, too, welcome the strategy. It includes ambitious targets for attracting inward investment and rightly identifies the timely and affordable devolution of corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland as a way of attracting inward investment. Through the Minister's experience, does she believe that, if and when we get that

power, it could help us not only to achieve those targets but potentially exceed them?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. All the economic advice that has been given to me by Oxford Economics and by Kate Barker and the Economic Advisory Group indicates the step change that would occur in the Northern Ireland economy if we could lower the rate of corporation tax here. Figures that go way into the future are sometimes hard to take on board, but we are talking about 4,000 to 5,000 extra new jobs if we had that power. That would make a huge difference, and the First Minister has already accepted that if we are successful in obtaining corporation tax powers for Northern Ireland — I believe that we will be successful — we will have to relook at our targets and strategy because it will make a real difference.

We are already punching above our weight in foreign direct investment. We have 2·4% of the United Kingdom's population, but 7% of the foreign direct investment comes to Northern Ireland. That is a very telling statistic. Next to London, Belfast gets most foreign direct investment. We should be very proud of that, and we do not say it enough. In fact, if you were to listen to some of our media, you would not believe that that is the case. We are hugely successful, and that is why Invest Northern Ireland met all its targets last time. I pay tribute to the work of my teams across the world in looking for opportunities and bringing them home to Northern Ireland.

Mr Durkan: I also welcome the economic strategy and thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Given the multitude of jobs that, it is hoped, are to be created in the tourism industry, what work will be done with the Department for Employment and Learning regarding the increased provision of tourism-specific courses and training, which will not only better enable people here to find employment but will enhance the tourism experience of visitors to the North?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, the tourism industry could provide us with up to 10,000 jobs over time. We want to see the increase, particularly in his city, in and around the UK City of Culture bid. We have had discussions with DEL, and I know that the industry has been very focused on skills and on the need to upskill the hospitality industry. That is something that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Tourism Ireland and all the players will continue to work together on. There were many strengths of the MTV awards, particularly the partnership approach to tourism. I see that as one of its strengths, and I see DEL being very much part of that.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive statement on the Northern Ireland economic strategy. Can the Minister advise us how the euro crisis is affecting the economic state of Northern Ireland?

1.45 pm

Mrs Foster: As the First Minister said in his statement, we are obviously part of the global economy now and a very proud part of it, but, of course, with that comes the fact that we have to deal with all its difficulties. There are very many difficulties in the global economy. We recently heard Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England, indicate that the euro zone was the biggest threat to the United Kingdom economy. That is very concerning. In many ways, there is not much that we in Northern Ireland can do about that, but we must be proactive in trying to deal with the issues that are before us, such as getting more people into work, encouraging more people to invest in research and development and ensuring that we have new and emerging export markets open to us. It is not just about deepening the exports that we have to all the countries that we do business with at present but about looking at new and emerging markets so that we can diversify for all our businesses in Northern Ireland. Things are difficult and challenging, but we need to sit back and make sure that we have the right policies in place to deal with what is coming down the road towards us.

Mr Buchanan: I welcome the statement. The recession and the banking crisis are having a huge impact on our construction industry, especially our small business sector, which lies close to my heart. We see now that the small business sector is paying a heavy price because it is unable to compete against the larger construction firms, which are eating up the work that the smaller businesses used to do. Can the Minister advise the House on how this strategy might help them?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. I recognise all the issues that he has raised. When one looks at the construction sector and considers the strengths that it had and the strong place that it was in a couple of

years ago, it is difficult to see how it has been dealt with over the past number of years and months. Through the three documents that are before the House — the Programme for Government, the investment strategy and the economic strategy — we are trying to identify opportunities for our small, medium and larger companies so that they have reason to look forward to the future and be sustainable.

The Member will see dotted throughout the document references to social and affordable houses, key roads and work on the health and education estates. We will assist in as many ways as we can across government. In my Department, we are hopeful that the jobs fund and the Boosting Business initiative will continue to help. We will be as proactive as we can. We need people to contact us using the free phone number, and we need to let them know that there are people out there who will help them and give advice and assistance. Do not leave things until the last minute, when the banks are about to foreclose: be proactive, come forward and look for assistance, and we will do all that we can.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister and welcome today's documents and statements. I particularly welcome the announcement that there are to be 6,500 jobs created in the small and medium business sector. When speaking to those sectors, I find that they are very concerned and that they feel that the Assembly does not necessarily know what they need on the ground. Will the Minister set up think tanks or similar mechanisms to listen and bounce off ideas, so that we can come up with a good action plan to enable us to have not only process but good, detailed action plans?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Part of the Boosting Business initiative is to get down to the small and medium-sized companies — the companies that do not have time to fill in forms or go to seminars and what have you. We will be as proactive as we can. I hope that Members will help us in that regard. I hope that, if constituents come to them to ask for assistance, they will direct them towards Invest Northern Ireland and the Boosting Business website, which is a micro website of our main website, and the free phone number, so that we can assist them. I also want to hear if Members and businessmen who have approached Invest Northern Ireland do not receive a positive response. Part of this is about us trying to be proactive and trying to help and assist. If Invest Northern Ireland cannot help, who else can? How can we signpost people towards help? I accept that, in the past, Invest Northern Ireland was perceived not to be an organisation for small and medium-sized businesses. I very much want to break that perception, and I want it to be a reality that we are helping the wider business base.

Mr Spratt: I too welcome the Minister's statement this afternoon. Recently, the Regional Development Committee visited two of our three airports to discuss the transport strategy, and one of the issues raised was air passenger duty. That is a problem for efforts to increase business on new routes. I appreciate the efforts of the Executive in reducing air passenger duty, but can the Minister give some more detail about how the issue can be moved forward and the important commitment brought forward as soon as possible?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, it was a great success to be able to negotiate with Her Majesty's Treasury, and I thank all colleagues for the work that was carried out on that. The rate of air passenger duty that applied to the flight to New York was reduced from band B to band A by 1 November 2011. We want to see the power to set air passenger duty coming to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and there is a commitment in the Programme for Government to do away with band B completely to make us even more competitive, as the First Minister said in his speech, on long-haul flights.

I have been discussing the issue with Belfast International Airport, which is working on a number of very real flights. We are offering any assistance that we can, both through my Department and through Tourism Ireland, to make sure that we get those flights to come back to Northern Ireland. That access is critical for us for tourism, given what is happening next year and the year after, but also for investment and business. We want to see more air access here, and the work that we have done on air passenger duty, which the Northern Ireland Office Ministers assisted us with, will bear fruit in the coming years.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. My particular thanks go to the Minister, both for the

development of the strategy and for her support locally in the constituency.

In the figures that have been outlined, we heard about the 114,000 people who are being taken out of the benefits trap — people who are currently claiming benefits — and put into employment. Will the Minister elaborate just a little more? There are 25,000 new jobs to be created under the strategy, and that leaves 89,000 people. From what I picked up earlier, am I right in saying that those people are to be put into training schemes? Perhaps the Minister can give us some indication. The number of people who are currently unemployed is around 62,000. That leaves approximately another 55,000 who are being removed from benefits and taken into this employment, whatever it is. Can the Minister give us some indication of what benefits those are likely to be?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question, but I think that he has misunderstood what I was saying about the 114,000 and the 25,000. The 25,000 jobs is Invest Northern Ireland's minimum job target, and that represents the jobs that are directly assisted by Invest Northern Ireland through the jobs fund, select financial assistance and all the mechanisms that we have to try to create jobs. The 114,000 jobs that are referenced in the document as people coming into employment is the potential that there is for the labour supply. Those jobs will be supported by DEL through a lot of its schemes. If the Member looks at page 37 of the Programme for Government, he will see a key commitment to:

> *"Support people (with an emphasis on young people) in to employment by providing skills and training".*

There are targets set against that as to how much money DEL will spend on the issue.

In our document and in the Programme for Government, we recognise that welfare reform will have a huge impact on the economy of Northern Ireland, in so far as it will mean that more people will be available for work. However, there will also be a reduction in the number of benefits paid and, therefore, a reduction in the money available to the economy. We have a challenge to face and, with our colleagues in DSD and DEL, we will face it and work through it as best we can. Of course, the social protection fund that OFMDFM has provided will assist in that as well.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for her statement and for her draft economic strategy. There has been coverage today of the major golf tournament that we hope to host in Northern Ireland. How will the tournament have a positive impact on the tourism industry in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, we very much want to take advantage of the brilliant 18 months that our golfing superstars have given us. They are almost getting too many to list, and I do not want to get into a position — like a presidential candidate — where I might forget the third or the fourth. Therefore, I will not go down that road. I will simply say that we want to take advantage of the spotlight that has been placed on Northern Ireland.

We have been working with a number of organisations and individuals, and we are active in meeting various bodies. We are determined to bring a European golf event to Northern Ireland in the near future. We also believe that there is a need to develop a holistic approach to golf tourism and its delivery. Therefore, we are proactively working with Coleraine Borough Council, and I pay tribute to the way in which it is working with us on the event as, indeed, is Royal Portrush. However, it is critical to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to gain economic benefit and legacy from whatever event we bring to Northern Ireland. I know and trust that it will be a tremendous event, and I look forward to attending it.

Mr Lyttle: I agree with the Minister that tackling educational underachievement is fundamental to the social and economic growth of Northern Ireland. Will she detail any discussions that she has had with the Minister of Education on how the targeted increase of 70% of young people gaining at least five good GCSEs will be achieved?

Mrs Foster: As the Member knows, the Education Minister sits on the subcommittee of Ministers who drew together the economic strategy. When the action plan is brought forward, that part of the economic strategy will sit firmly with the Education Minister, in conjunction with his colleagues. We felt that there was no point in looking at an economic strategy without looking at skills and without having the appropriate education results in place. Therefore, I very much welcome the fact

that all my Executive colleagues have made input to the economic strategy and have made it the meaningful document that I believe it to be.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her statement and the draft economic strategy. I welcome the talk of improving employability and the level, relevance and use of skills, as well as the proposal to introduce social clauses into contracts for public works to deliver opportunities for apprentices and the long-term unemployed. Are there proposals to develop and enhance co-operation between employers and the whole of the education sector to ensure that our young people are directed to further their study into skills areas where jobs will actually become available? There is a great number of small and medium-sized enterprises in my constituency of Mid Ulster, and I would like to receive an assurance that that co-operation is not only with the largest companies in Northern Ireland and that those small and medium-sized enterprises are included as well. Will the Minister provide more detail?

2.00 pm

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. As I said in response to the previous question, it was vital that the strategy fitted across education, skills and, in particular, my Department.

As I understand it, in education, there is, and has been for some time, a strong emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects. In the past couple of weeks, I was due to speak to a group of potential engineering students interested in going to Queen's University, but, unfortunately, I was unable to attend that meeting. However, the idea is that we should give leadership to those young people and show them that, should they decide to take part in degree courses, or in other skills training, those courses are economically relevant and that, at the end of the day, they will be in possession of a job. Recent work by the Northern Ireland Science Park on the knowledge economy of Northern Ireland showed that, statistically, people with relevant economic degrees are 50% more likely to have a job.

For parents advising children on job options, careers advice is critical. What we need to do, and what I hope will happen over the coming years and months, is to be able to show young people examples of what they could do if they decide to take a particular route in their education and skills training. It is important that we alert students to that potential in the coming days and years.

Social economy clauses existed in some of our bigger projects and were part of the contract for the Titanic signature project. Their use in such contracts has proved very successful, and that is why we have endorsed them.

It is up to all of us to ensure that, when working with small and medium-sized employers, they feel that they can approach us. That is the case whether that contact is at MLA level, ministerial level or through Invest Northern Ireland. Those employers should be able to access the help available to them.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for getting through so many questions in a relatively short time. As someone who, in the Minister's words is "green in the right way," I believe that we should use the economic downturn as an opportunity to create a new economy; a green economy and a just economy, in which the 1% do not profit on the backs of the rest of us. Given that sociologist Professor Paddy Hillyard assessed the policies of the previous Executive as taking money away from the working classes to give to the middle classes, will the Minister confirm what specific measures are in place in the strategy to ensure that economic growth does not increase the income and health inequalities that come with it?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question, but, looking at the previous Programme for Government targets, I dispute what he said about how we dealt with people who did not have very much money and were living in poverty. Invest Northern Ireland hit every one of its targets in the previous Programme for Government for bringing jobs and investment into Northern Ireland.

I know that the Member has a particular interest in the renewables sector. I referenced that sector in my previous comments, and it is in the economic strategy, as it should be. However, it is not there at the expense of everything else. He needs to recognise that other sectors perform for Northern Ireland and that they do so to give the people of Northern Ireland a bright economic future. Those sectors are also identified and prioritised in the strategy, and we will take them forward.

Mr Speaker: Before we come to the Adjournment, I want to speak to the House. It is unfortunate

that Mr Allister has left the Chamber. Members continue to raise points of order on the issue that he raised this morning. However, after Mr Allister raised that point of order, he felt, in whatever way, that it was not dealt with correctly and issued a public statement criticising the Speaker and the House. That says more about the Member who carries out that type of action than the work ongoing in the House. Members continue to raise the issue of why they do not get to ask a question on a ministerial statement, but it is quite clear that it is not possible for me to move Members up the list. I have 108 Members in the Chamber, and I must get the balance of the parties right.

It is not about the balance of opinions in the House; it is about the balance of parties. It is not possible to just move Members up a particular list of speakers, irrespective of what item of business is in the Order Paper. However, I have to say that I think that Members who go outside to criticise the Speaker and the workings of the House because they feel that their point of order has not been dealt with certainly need to be condemned.

Adjourned at 2.05 pm.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Environment

Extreme Rainfall: Help for Householders

Published at 4:00pm on Wednesday 26 October 2011

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Members will be aware that the exceptionally heavy rainfall since last Sunday has led to many homes being flooded in different parts of Northern Ireland and presented major challenges for not only the local people who have been affected but also the numerous agencies that have come to their rescue.

We are still, to some extent, in a response and recovery phase and trying to collate information, as a result of the significant adverse weather and rainfall. However, I wish to update Members and draw their attention to the action taken by DOE and District Councils to date.

I was in Beragh, near Omagh, yesterday where the river burst its banks and left people trapped in their homes. Eighteen people, including children, had to be rescued by boat from flooded houses and brought to safety by the Fire and Rescue Service. Their homes have been badly damaged by flood water. This was a terrible scene to witness and it is likely to take many months to repair these houses, leaving residents struggling and having to live in temporary alternative accommodation.

I also visited the local gaelic club 'Red Knights' to inspect the severely damaged club premises which are some of the best in the land and have been flood damaged for the second time in four years. The damage to homes and community facilities is severe not least in a town which needs homes and community facilities. Following my visit to Beragh, I spoke to Minister Kennedy and Minister O'Neill. I gave them an assessment of the situation and my judgement beyond immediate support for individual householders and local councils. There is an urgent need for short term mitigation of the risk and an immediate term solution to the flooding threat.

As a result of this case and many other flooded homes, I have taken the decision, along with the Department of Finance and Personnel, to make emergency funds available to local councils to help those affected by the recent floods. Councils can offer a range of practical help and guidance, including collection, retention and disposal of damaged household contents, assistance in making arrangements to clean up homes and gardens and by providing dehumidifiers to dry out homes.

It is also important that the Executive demonstrates that it wants to help those most severely affected to get them back on their feet again and to assist them in ensuring their homes are habitable. Therefore, in addition to receiving practical help from councils, individual householders who suffer severe inconvenience as a direct result of the floods will be eligible for a £1,000 payment. This is intended to help alleviate immediate hardship; it is not a compensation payment.

The Department will be writing to Local Government Chief Executives to confirm that I have activated the "Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance to District Councils". Working with and through Councils, the aim of this scheme is to ensure that practical and financial help is delivered where most needed as quickly as possible.

The Department will reimburse Councils for expenditure incurred as a result of taking immediate action following this emergency situation. Expenditure deemed eligible will be categorised under one or more of the following headings:

i Payments to Individual Householders;

ii Direct Costs Incurred by Councils; and

iii Services Contracted out (indirect costs).

Individual householders can apply for payments where there is evidence of significant flooding of homes, damage to septic tanks caused by flooding, damage to oil tanks, resulting in non operation of heating systems, flooding of garages/utility areas where household utilities are installed and for apartments where there is evidence of flooding of basements containing storage rooms and also the flooding of caravans where these are the main place of residence.

Householders eligible for payment must produce evidence that the property for which assistance is being claimed is their main place of residence. They must notify District Councils within 21 calendar days of the last recorded date of the flooding incident and allow for their home to be inspected by a senior official such as an Environmental Health Officer who can obtain evidence that complies with the Scheme.

As I have mentioned, Councils will be entitled to financial assistance where it has incurred direct or indirect costs helping people make their homes habitable. Councils have knowledge of the processes, having unfortunately been in this situation before, and I have every confidence that they will expedite the Scheme to ensure payments are provided to those in hardship soon.

It is appropriate that I acknowledge the work of the councils in regard to the flooding, particularly their emergency planning officers and direct labour force who have been working around the clock since last Sunday when it became apparent that local people were in difficulty from the extreme rainfall.

Key to the ongoing successful management of the emergency response and recovery has been the co-ordination protocols led by the Local Government Emergency Management Group supported by Belfast City Council's Emergency Planning Staff.

In addition, I commend the work of all the responding agencies that have played a significant role in providing emergency assistance to the Northern Ireland public affected by this exceptional weather.

Whilst the weather situation is improving over the next few days, the effects will be around for weeks and months to come and it was only right, as a locally elected administration, we moved in a way to help local people when they needed it most.

Once again I am grateful for all those agencies involved. I will continue to monitor the situation with my officials and work through the local government structures to ensure people and communities are effectively assisted during this weather emergency.

Written Answers

This section contains the written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 28 October 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Social Investment Fund

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for an update on the Social Investment Fund; and (ii) when the public consultation process will begin.

(AQW 2310/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd (The First Minister and Acting deputy First Minister): The First Minister and the Minister exercising the functions of the deputy First Minister launched the public consultation on 27 September in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings.

Executive Office in Brussels

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the annual cost of the Executive Office in Brussels; and (ii) how much the Office has spent on hospitality in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2964/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: The tables below list both the annual cost (i) and the amount spent on hospitality (ii) for each of the last three financial years.

The increase in annual costs in 2009-2010 and the corresponding drop in expenditure on hospitality was due to the relocation of the office to new premises. These new premises provide a modern professional business environment to organisations conducting business in Brussels on behalf of Northern Ireland.

The annual expenditure includes the costs for OFMDFM staff in the office as well but does not include the contributions, in relation to rent and other charges, received from DARD and InvestNI in relation to the staff from the both organisations based in the Office. While the associated charges for the current premises are still being finalised, the contribution from DARD and INI is currently approximately £28k per annum.

The Office hosts a wide range of events that incur hospitality costs from seminars and receptions to working meetings over lunch. The vast majority of these events are operated on a cost recover basis where the organisation running the event reimburses the Office for hospitality costs. The Office contributes to the events by providing both the venue and the assistance of the staff of the Office. Prior approval and commitment to pay costs is secured by the Office before incurring any costs on behalf of third party organisations. The amounts listed below (ii) are the net amounts spent on hospitality by the office in Brussels.

(i)

Annual cost of the Executive Office in Brussels	**2008-09 £'000**	**2009-10 £'000**	**2010-11 £'000**
Running costs	648.9	891.6	797.3
Capital costs	23.7	881.5	11.1

Annual cost of the Executive Office in Brussels	2008-09 £'000	2009-10 £'000	2010-11 £'000
Depreciation/Impairment charges on Capital	7.6	147.3	92.5

(ii)

Executive Office in Brussels - Hospitality Charges	2008-09 £'000	2009-10 £'000	2010-11 £'000
Hospitality	14.8	4.0	18.4

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any emerging financial pressures that have been identified by their Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3144/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister registered two small capital bids totalling £0.200m in its October Monitoring proposals. No emerging financial pressures have been identified in this exercise.

Strategic Investment Board Members

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the (i) date; and (ii) amount of any bonuses paid to members of the Strategic Investment Board since its creation.

(AQW 3182/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: Members of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) have never received bonuses; however the following amounts of performance related pay were awarded to SIB staff for the years since its creation on 1 April 2003 as set out below:

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
£	9,027	132,074	154,357	250,668	312,266	305,606

In line with the Executive's policy on bonuses for senior officials in arm's length bodies, there have been no awards of performance related pay to staff in the SIB since 2008-09.

Regeneration of Former Security Sites

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the regeneration of former security sites.

(AQO 499/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: Six former Military sites were gifted to the Executive under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative in 2002. Two of the sites, barracks at Malone Road and in Magherafelt, were sold for development in 2003 and 2010 respectively.

Three additional sites were gifted earlier this year under the Hillsborough Agreement. The Lisanelly site in Omagh was transferred to the Department of Education for development as a schools campus. The site at Shackleton, Ballykelly was transferred into the administrative control of OFMDFM on 7 October. We are currently considering options for the remaining two sites at Omagh (St Lucia) and Ballymena (St Patrick's Barracks).

Budget Review Group

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many times the Budget Review Group has met in the last three months.

(AQO 649/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: The Budget Review Group has met on one occasion during this period, as no meetings were scheduled during the summer recess.

Ballykelly: Former Army Barracks Site

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans there are to develop a master plan for the development of the former army barracks site at Ballykelly; and who will be involved.

(AQW 3406/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: OFMDFM assumed responsibility for the former military site at Shackleton on 7 October 2011. Work is currently underway to examine the options for this site which will include a comprehensive assessment of its economic potential. Following receipt of this report we will decide on the next steps in determining its future.

Social Investment Fund

Ms P Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the potential benefits of the Social Investment Fund for the North Belfast constituency.

(AQO 611/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: The outcome of the public consultation process, which we launched on 27 September, will inform how the Social Investment Fund will operate and how specific communities will benefit.

Communities, such as North Belfast, will benefit from a co-ordinated and strategic approach to issues of poverty and disadvantage which will see those communities determine the priority needs in their areas and develop responses in partnership with Government, the statutory sector and the voluntary and community sector.

United States of America: Links with

Mr T Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the importance of continued links with the United States of America.

(AQO 613/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: The United States is one of the world's major economic and political powerhouses and has played an important role in the transformation here through its support for the peace process and in encouraging economic investment.

We have enjoyed unprecedented level of access and goodwill in the US through the support of the Clinton, Bush and Obama Administrations and we are focused on realising the benefits of this engagement from a political, business and tourism perspective. In particular, the Bureau, with offices in Washington and New York, is furthering these relationships working closely with other agencies, including InvestNI and Tourism Ireland.

On the business front, the US remains our single largest foreign investor and to date 140 companies have established a presence here, employing over 14,000 people. This underlines the importance of the US market and InvestNI's success in attracting new jobs from global companies such as NYSE, Liberty Mutual, Allstate and Citibank.

From a trade perspective, local companies exported over £1.6 billion to North America last year and it is also an important growth market for tourism with some 146,000 visiting here in 2009.

The importance of continued links with the US is also recognised by this Assembly in setting up an All-Party Group to further connections in North America.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Sheehan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Executive will be in a position to consider and agree the way forward on the Review of Public Administration.

(AQO 617/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr O'Dowd: The First Minister and deputy First Minister agreed a way forward on the Review of Public Administration based on the paper that was considered in the Executive meeting of 18 November 2010. The Minister for the Department of the Environment has been asked by the Executive to bring forward a paper setting out the implementation of these arrangements.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Timber Sales

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the tonnage of timber sold in each of the last five years; (ii) the income generated from the sales; (iii) the purchasers of the timber; and (iv) whether an approved procurement procedure was followed on each occassion.

(AQW 3080/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Over the past five years the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has (i) sold the following tonnes of timber and (ii) generated the following revenue:

	Tonnage	Income generated
1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007 402,862 m3 sold	342,570	£5.928 million
1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008 407, 104 m3 sold	346,177	£6.803 million
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009 403,198 m3 sold	342,855	£7.515 million
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010 401,360 m3 sold	341,293	£7.243 million
1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011 456,151 m3 sold	387,884	£7.712 million

(iii) the following companies bought timber from Forest Service in the years detailed below.

Company names	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Balcas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A Diamond & Son	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Drenagh Sawmills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ecowood Energy Systems		✓	✓	✓	
Eamon Flaherty Timber					✓
Glennon Bros	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Company names	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Haslett Timber Products	✓	✓	✓	✓	
JF Irvine Sawmills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leitrim Sawmills	✓	✓	✓		✓
John McHale Timber	✓			✓	
Murray Timber Products	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
M&H Tree Services		✓	✓	✓	
Mountbellew Timber Products	✓	✓	✓		✓
PM Processing	✓			✓	
S & J Contracts			✓		
A&R Taggart	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rea Sawmills				✓	✓
Farm Woodlands Ltd				✓	
West Timber		✓			✓

A number of other individuals also bought timber. Their details, held by Forest Service, cannot be released in accordance with section 40 (2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

(iv) Forest Service entered into sales arrangements with customers using the following approved sales procedures, Long Term Contract (LTC), Tender Sale (TS) and Negotiated Sale. The sales procedures for timber volume sold over the period were allocated thus:

	1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007	1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008	1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009	1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010	1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011
LTC	97%	96%	97%	98%	98%
TS	3%	4%	3%	2%	2%
	(Percentage of timber volume offered for sale)				

Less than 1% of timber per year was sold through the Negotiated Sale method.

Forests

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's plans for the promotion of forests as a welcoming place to develop healthy lifestyles; and to outline the budget for such promotions over the next four years.

(AQW 3081/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The 2009 publication A Strategy to Develop the Recreational and Social Use of Our Forests set specific targets for contributing to health and education. By 2013 we will have

- Explored opportunities for increasing cycling and horse riding in forests
- Encouraged increased use of forests close to towns and villages by local people
- Explored opportunities for children's play and leisure facilities and provision for young people within Forest Parks
- Developed arrangements for promoting the use of forests for new outdoor learning opportunities

The Strategy set a framework to achieve this through public participation in our forest planning process, through legislation, guidance and through partnership working. The implementation of this strategy has seen the development of close working relationships with District Councils, public sector organisations and groups like the National Trust to explore new opportunities.

An example of partnership working was our participation in National Trails Day on Sunday 2nd October. This gave us an opportunity to raise awareness of our wonderful variety of trails and provided a chance for everyone to enjoy some of our most beautiful countryside, forests, mountains and lakes. This was the fourth year running that Forest Service participated in National Trail's Day in co-operation with Coillte. Seventeen special events were hosted and facilitated in our forests, including red squirrel walks, woodland walks and horse-riding.

The budget for these activities is not identified separately within wider Forest Service activities and the strategy does not extend beyond 2013.

Assistance for People Living and Working in Rural Areas

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps are being taken to assist people living and working in rural areas to continue to do so.

(AQW 3125/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has many diverse funding programmes which seek to assist farmers and other rural businesses improve performance in the market place, improve the quality of life of rural dwellers and develop a more sustainable business, work and leisure environment.

There are too many contributory funding programmes, grant schemes and subsidies to list individually in this answer, but I am happy to provide further details separately if required. I should however mention the Rural Development Programme which funds rural tourism initiatives and village renewal schemes as well as providing training for farmers and farm families.

In addition to current funding programmes, I am leading on the development of the Executive's Rural White Paper Action Plan aimed at improving the wellbeing of rural communities. It will contain commitments by all Departments across a wide range of rural issues and challenges, including matters relating to access to services, urban/ rural linkages, sustainable rural communities and economies and a sustainable countryside.

You will appreciate that my Department cannot single-handedly address all the challenges facing our rural communities and that the joined-up approach adopted in the Rural White Paper Action Plan shows that the future well-being, quality of life and sustainability of our farming and rural communities requires input right across government.

My Department will continue to work hard to achieve its ongoing vision of a thriving and sustainable rural community and environment.

Shooting Sports

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of shooting sports.

(AQW 3149/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department licences approximately 22,000 hectares of forest land for the provision of rough shooting. Forest Service also facilitates access to its forests for people who hold the relevant sporting rights.

CAFRE supports the development of a grouse moor on the Glenwherry Hill Farm in County Antrim to promote sustainable environmental practices and sustainable livestock production.

Forest Service: Wildlife Wardens

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how does Forest Service meet the training and supervision requirements of its three Wildlife Wardens as contained in the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978.

(AQW 3150/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service wildlife wardens have been trained to industry best practice standards and are supervised by professional forest managers.

Forest Service has produced and maintains a Health & Safety Manual that is made available to all members of staff. It is the operation of the procedures within this extensive manual that ensures the provision of such information, instruction, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of all staff including our Wildlife Wardens.

Deer Management Partnership

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether Forest Service has considered a Deer Management Partnership to promote access and equality as part of its Strategy to Develop the Recreational and Social Use of Our Forests.

(AQW 3151/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Although deer stalking is a sport in its own right, it is usually conducted as part of an overall deer management strategy which seeks to create a balance between maintaining a healthy population and limiting the economic and ecological damage which deer inflict.

As a result, I am very interested in the development and subsequent engagement with deer management groups or partnerships which can consensually implement effective deer control across multiple land and sporting right ownership. This is an area we would like to see developed and integrated with our arrangements where we own the shooting rights.

We have suggested that representatives of shooting organisations could take an active role in developing such groups through the involvement of their members.

Forest Service

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total hectarage of land on which Forest Service has control of the sporting rights, either through ownership or legal agreement.

(AQW 3152/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service controls through ownership or lease the Sporting Rights on 42,359 ha of land. Of this 22,200 ha is let for sporting activities.

Alien Muntjac Deer, Chinese Water Deer and Roe Deer

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to what extent have alien Muntjac Deer, Chinese Water Deer and Roe Deer penetrated Forest Service owned or controlled woodland; and in what areas have these deer been found.

(AQW 3153/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A single Muntjac deer was shot at Mount Stewart on the Ards peninsula. No Muntjac deer, Chinese water deer or Roe deer have been observed in other Forest Service woodlands.

Sustainable Livestock Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has considered introducing a Sustainable Livestock Bill which would require the production of a strategy to assess the impact that the livestock sector has on the environment, set out the policy changes needed to reduce

the impact, ensure problems are not simply moved overseas, and support a sustainable and thriving UK farming industry.

(AQW 3156/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not considered introducing a Sustainable Livestock Bill. However my Department considers sustainability factors for the livestock sectors as it develops policies, advice and guidance. For example, the Focus on Food Strategy has established foundations to build a sustainable and thriving local industry to achieve economic and social benefits while providing protection of the environment.

Additionally within the developing Reduction Framework for agriculture greenhouse gases, better livestock management is a central theme alongside improved nutrient management, renewable energy and fuel efficiency.

This Framework, which will be published in the coming months, aims to set out a range of measures which will support sustainable livestock production here and promote a reduction in its environmental impacts.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any financial pressures that have been identified by her Department as part of the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3201/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department identified one pressure for submission to DFP for consideration by the Executive as part of the October Monitoring Round. The pressure submitted was for £0.5m, in respect of Hedging Foreign Exchange Transactions.

Renewable Energy Projects: Assistance

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm owners in East Londonderry have (i) applied for; and (ii) received assistance towards renewable energy projects on their land in the last three years.

(AQW 3206/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department has received 10 applications for assistance towards renewable energy projects from farm owners in your constituency area. A total of 3 farm owners from this area have received financial assistance within the last 3 years.

Under the Biomass Processing Challenge Fund one application was received and awarded financial assistance for a renewable energy project.

Under the NI Rural Development Plan, Axis 3 measures, nine projects from this area applied for financial assistance, two of these renewable energy projects have received assistance.

Disposal of Animals and Animal By-products

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many successful cases have been taken in each of the last five years by her Department against people who have (i) dumped fallen farm animals; and (ii) wrongfully disposed of animal by-products.

(AQW 3209/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

	Cases against people who have dumped fallen animals	Number of convictions for wrongful disposal of animal by-products
18/10/2006 – 17/10/2007	0	6 convictions for a total of 13 offences
18/10/2007 – 17/10/2008	0	4 convictions for a total of 5 offences
18/10/2008 – 17/10/2009	0	1 conviction for 1 offence
18/10/2009 – 17/10/2010	0	5 convictions for a total of 6 offences
18/10/2010 – 17/10/2011	1	1 conviction for 1 offence

Deer Population on Forest Service Land

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the growth of the deer population on Forest Service land, with particular reference to Randalstown, which has seen the Fallow Deer population rise from 30 or 40 deer to an estimated 200 deer.

(AQW 3245/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Monitoring of the presence of deer has indicated an increase in the size and range of deer populations across Forest Service land. It is often the case with deer present on Forest Service land that factors on land outside the Department's control have an effect on overall population numbers. Factors that influence the size of a given herd include the availability of suitable habitat, predation of young and deer management objectives including the overall level of culling and cull ratios between male and female.

It is for this reason that Forest Service is interested in the development of deer management groups which can consensually implement effective deer control across multiple land and sporting right ownerships. This is an area we would like to see developed and integrated with our arrangements where we own the shooting rights. Forest Service has suggested that representatives of shooting organisations could take an active role in developing such groups through the involvement of their members. A further meeting has been organised with BASC to explore opportunities.

The population estimate of 200 animals for Randalstown includes deer using land adjacent to Randalstown forest. The estimate of approximately 40 animals was an estimate of animals on Forest Service land only. The larger estimate is a more useful indication of herd size for control purposes within the wider Randalstown area.

Muntjac Deer

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the damage that Muntjac deer cause to the woodland floor.

(AQW 3246/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Muntjac, as with other deer species, browse herbs and shrubs found in woodlands. Depending on grazing pressure, this may lead to changes in woodland structure and ecology, ultimately inhibiting woodland regeneration by removing seedlings and coppice re-growth, the structure of the shrub and ground layers and the fauna that depend on them for food or shelter, such as birds and butterflies.

Forest Service: Wildlife Wardens

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Forest Service's three Wildlife Wardens are solely responsible for the culling of deer or are any other bodies involved.

(AQW 3247/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service wildlife wardens are solely responsible for the culling of deer on Forest Service land where DARD owns the sporting rights, as part of their wider wildlife management duties.

Carcasses of Deer Culled by the Forest Service

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is done with the carcasses of deer culled by the Forest Service.

(AQW 3248/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The vast majority of carcasses of culled wild deer are removed by Forest Service from woodlands for disposal, although this is not a requirement where the risk to people or the environment is minimal. These carcasses are transported to a central deer larder for onward sale to an Approved Game Handling Establishment via an open tender process.

Waterways Running through Crawfordsburn Village

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans the Rivers Agency has to un-silt the waterways running through Crawfordsburn village.

(AQW 3258/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are a number of designated watercourses in the vicinity of Crawfordstown Village for which my Rivers Agency have an annual maintenance responsibility, they are regularly inspected. The short reach of the Ballymullan Stream associated with a grille is inspected on a weekly basis and both the Clandeboye and Crawfordsburn Drains were inspected in October 2011, no desilting was required as part of the maintenance works completed. The Ballysallagh Burn has recently been inspected and maintenance work will be carried out before the end of March 2012, desilting will be conducted if it is required. If significant accumulations of silt are encountered in watercourses during routine maintenance inspections, consideration is given to their removal in order that a free flow of water in the watercourses can be preserved. Such removal of silt must be carried out in an environmentally friendly manner and in accordance with any relevant environmental legislation. However, an undesignated open watercourse known as the Lower Burn is located to the north and west of the village. The maintenance responsibility for undesignated watercourses rests with the riparian occupiers of the land through which it flows or forms boundaries to.

Department's Independent Panel

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the appointments made to her Department's Independent Panel.

(AQW 3270/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The process to appoint new members to the Department's Independent Panel is ongoing at present. It is anticipated that the appointments will commence on 1 February 2012.

Deer Poaching

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any evidence of deer poaching uncovered by her Department and the Forest Service.

(AQW 3274/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service reported six cases of suspected poaching activity to PSNI during 2010. Poaching activity is suspected when animals are found with gunshot wounds, or meat has been recovered from carcasses left in forests.

Equality Impact Assessments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what the cost to her Department was in the 2010/11 financial year for carrying out Equality Impact Assessments.

(AQW 3318/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Section 75 statutory duties make equality and good relations central to the whole range of public policy decision-making. Therefore the cost of carrying out Equality Impact Assessments are not maintained separately and cannot readily be disaggregated.

Arm's-length Bodies

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has (a) carried out any value for money audits on its arm's-length bodies it funds; and (b) identified any savings that could be made by these bodies.

(AQW 3330/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has not carried out any value for money audits on its arm's length bodies. The internal audit arrangements in place for the Department's arm's length bodies are in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The arm's length bodies sponsored by my Department participated in the Budget 2010 review process and contributed, as appropriate, to the savings required under that exercise.

My Department is participating in the arm's length body review being conducted centrally by the Budget Review Group to establish the scope for abolition, merger or absorption into departmental structures of each body. The Budget Review Group is expected to convey its recommendations to the Executive in due course.

Floodbank Adjacent to The Meadows in Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on (i) the progress; and (ii) the expected effectiveness of the minor works to landscape the floodbank adjacent to The Meadows in Ballymoney.

(AQW 3342/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am advised that minor landscaping to the floodbank adjacent to the Meadows in Ballymoney have been completed. This work intends to reinstate the area and it involved some localised top-soiling and sowing of grass seed. It is expected that when mature, these measures will be effective.

Mourne Herring Fishery Quota

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Mourne Herring Fishery Quota is a percentage of the Irish Sea Herring Quota and why it is fixed at 30 tonnes.

(AQW 3345/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no fixed methodology for establishing the Mourne Herring Quota. Prior to 2002 the Department liaised with the Mourne Small Boats Association and an amount of quota was agreed based on what the Association believed it could catch. The Association appears to have dissolved after 2002. This may have been related to lack of interest in the fishery, as between 2000 and 2004 no Mourne herring was landed. In 2000 the starting allocation was 40 tonnes and thereafter it has been set at 30 tonnes. There was renewed interest in the fishery in 2005 with landings of 109.9 tonnes but landings in 2006 and 2007 were only 19.1 and 32.6 tonnes. Since 2008 the fishery has been prosecuted on a more regular basis with landings in excess of 128 tonnes each year. In each of these years the starting quota of 30 tonnes has been supplemented by a combination of "banking" of unused quota from the previous season, international quota swaps with the south of Ireland, and donations from the Producer Organisations. If the starting quota is to be set at higher level that 30

tonnes it would require the Producer Organisations (Pos) to give up some of their expected share of the Irish Sea herring quota since the Mourne Herring quota is part of the overall Irish Sea quota for which the POs hold shares called Fixed Quota Allocation units.

Mourne Herring Fishery Stocks

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the current assessment of herring stocks in the Mourne Fishery area; (ii) what research is undertaken to keep assessments up-to-date; and (iii) whether she intends to secure a quota which reflects the healthy nature of the stock.

(AQW 3348/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The herring stock that supports the Mourne herring fishery is part of the Irish Sea north (Area VIIa north of 52o30'N) herring stock and it is the Irish Sea north stock that is assessed. The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) stock advice of June 2011 advises that a full assessment providing absolute values for the size of the stock is not available. On this basis ICES advised, on a precautionary basis, that landings of herring from Area VIIa north should not increase in 2012. Data for traditional stock assessments has been supplemented in recent years by additional acoustic survey data carried out under the supervision of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in collaboration with the local pelagic fishing fleet and funded by my Department. This data clearly shows trends indicating that the spawning stock biomass is increasing. This data was used to successfully argue for a 10% increase in the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for 2011. However under the policy for setting TACs adopted by the European Commission for 2012 this data has not been fully utilised by the Commission and it has even proposed a precautionary reduction in the TAC. It will be one of my main priorities at this years December Fisheries Council to present a strong case to the Commission to argue strongly for an increase in the Irish Sea north TAC. I plan to continue the acoustic survey programme to further strengthen our case for increased herring TAC in future.

Mourne Herring Fishery

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the Mourne Herring Fishery is closed when the quota has not been reached.

(AQW 3349/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Thirty two point one tonnes were allocated for the Mourne herring fishery for 2011 and this was supplemented by producer organisation quota. As of 17 October 2011 83.7 tonnes had been landed. We understand that producer organisations can donate a further 18 tonnes but this amount is insufficient to cover a days fishing by all vessels holding a Mourne Herring fishery permit. However a quota swap for a further 100 tonnes of Mourne Herring was concluded on 21 October and further fishing will be permitted to allow this quota to be taken.

Farmers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many successful cases the Department has taken against farmers for (i) failing to allow inspectors access; and (ii) failing to notify the Department of the death of an animal in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3350/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

	Failing to Allow Inspectors Access	**Failing to notify the Dept of death of an animal**
17/10/2006 - 16/10/2007	0	4 convictions (against 3 farmers) for a total of 18 failures to notify.

	Failing to Allow Inspectors Access	Failing to notify the Dept of death of an animal
17/10/2007- 16/10/2008	0	4 convictions for a total of 16 charges.
17/10/2008 - 16/10/2009	0	4 convictions for total of 4 charges
17/10/2009 - 16/10/2010	0	1 conviction for 1 charge
17/10/2010 - 17/10/2011	1 conviction of obstruction	1 conviction for 1 charge

Area VII under the Western Waters

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why Area VII under the Western Waters scallops effort regime is closed; and when it is due to re-open.

(AQW 3351/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At the end of September 2011 the British and north of Ireland uptake of Area VII scallop effort was 3.14m kilowatt days out of a maximum allowable effort of 3.31m kilowatt days. Since no additional scallop effort had been secured through international effort swaps, there has been no alternative but to close the fishery in Area VII from 1st October.

The Marine Management Organisation is continuing to negotiate with other Member States that have spare scallop effort in order to secure sufficient effort to permit the fishery to open until the end of the year. The fishery will remain closed until additional effort is secured.

Scallops

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that queen and king scallops are separate fisheries, why, in quota and management terms, are they treated as one; and for her assessment of whether unnecessary pressure is put on the queen scallop stock in Area VI when the dredging boats, normally used to fish king scallops, are allowed in without restraint.

(AQW 3352/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The British and north of Ireland Fisheries Administrations hold the view that under the "Western Waters" Council Regulation EC No. 1415/2004 the term "scallop" includes both King and Queen Scallops. However the Administrations are now aware that other Member States have interpreted "scallop" differently and we intend to clarify this ambiguous definition with the Commission in the New Year. It has been agreed with British and north of Ireland scallop industry representatives not to seek clarification sooner as a ruling to exclude queen scallop from the definition would have the effect of making the King Scallop effort overshoot in 2011 even worse.

My officials met our Scallop Association on 30th September to discuss the Area VII scallop closure and the effect of displacement of effort into Area VI. It was agreed that the displacement was undesirable but that there was nothing that could be implemented in time during 2011 to control this expansion. However it was decided that the Department should work with the Scallop Association to develop a sustainable management regime for the North Coast queen scallop fishery for 2012 that would limit exploitation to those vessels that historically fished in the area.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any easements that have been identified by her Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3361/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My department did not declare any easements in the October Monitoring Round.

Woodland Cover

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what grants or incentives are available to increase woodland cover.

(AQW 3374/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Forest Service provides grant aid and advice to encourage more farmers and landowners to create woodland, through the Woodland Grant Scheme and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme. Grant rates were increased by up to 30 per cent in November 2009. In addition, woodland creation has been encouraged through:

- Implementing beneficial changes to the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme allowing farmers to continue to receive SFP, as well as forestry grant payments, on land converted to woodland;
- Extending the funding of the Short Rotation Coppice Scheme until the end of the current Rural Development Programme in 2013;
- Engaging with a wide range of landowning bodies, such as local councils, and other central Government Departments, encouraging them to consider woodland as a viable economic alternative to their current land use;
- Engaging with afforestation stakeholders to identify barriers to woodland creation and assist in the development of proposals for future mechanisms to support woodland creation;

In addition to the Woodland Grant Scheme and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, participants in agri-environment schemes may avail of funding for planting small areas of native trees on farmland and managing existing woodland. These schemes include the Countryside Management Scheme and Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme.

Implanted Microchips

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the percentage of animals that will develop cancer around implanted microchips.

(AQW 3422/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Concern that there may be a causal link between microchipping and cancer in dogs was raised by a small number of consultees during consultation on the proposals for new dogs control legislation in 2009. My officials considered these concerns during the drafting of the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011.

There is evidence that any invasive foreign body very slightly increases the risk of the formation of benign or malignant tumours. There are a small number of studies that have seen growths around chips implanted in laboratory animals, including rodents genetically modified to be prone to cancer, as well as the sites of vaccination injections. However, it is clear from the Small Animal Veterinary Association's records that any such risk from microchipping is very low. Since 1996, of more than 5 million microchipped animals, only 429 cases of chip failure or adverse reactions to a microchip were reported.

Of these 429 failures, and adverse reactions, all but 68 involved the migration, loss or failure of the chip, rather than a health issue and only 3 cases involved a tumour in the area of the implantation site but with no further evidence of any causal link. The risks involved are considered to be very low.

In comparison, more than 1,100 stray dogs were put down here last year because they could not be identified and so were not reclaimed and were unable to be re-homed.

The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 provides for an exemption where a Veterinarian in his professional capacity confirms that microchipping could cause health problems for an individual dog.

Stray Animals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) what percentage of stray animals have been reunited with their owners in each of the last three years; (ii) what percentage of stray animals, which have an implanted microchip, have been reunited with their owners in each of the last three years; and (iii) for an estimate of the number of stray animals which will be reunited with their owners annually following the introduction of compulsory microchipping.

(AQW 3423/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has legislative responsibility for stray dogs. Local Councils are responsible for enforcing all aspects of the Dogs Order 1983, as amended, and are required to provide statistical information to my Department on the operational aspects of the legislation. Based on the information provided by the Councils, I can only provide information on stray dogs rather than stray animals in general.

(i) In 2010, 34% of stray dogs impounded were reclaimed by their owners. In 2009 and 2008 this figure was 31%.

(ii) The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 amends the Dogs Order 1983 to make it a requirement that a dog is microchipped before a Council can issue a dog licence. I intend to commence this provision of the Act in April 2012. As microchipping is not yet a condition for obtaining a dog licence my Department does not hold any information on the number of microchipped stray dogs that have been re-united with their owners.

(iii) While it is impossible to estimate the number of stray dogs that will be reunited annually with their owners following the introduction of the new microchipping powers under the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011, the expectation is that the figure will be considerably higher than at present. Widespread micro-chipping will improve the traceability of dogs therefore making it easier for dogs to be re-united with their owners in the event of straying or theft.

Cost of Answering Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the average cost to her Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3442/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

Rural White Paper Action Plan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has secured any financial commitment from her Executive colleagues to implement any of the the actions contained in her Department's Rural White Paper Action Plan.

(AQW 3459/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All Departments have contributed to the development of the draft Rural White Paper Action Plan and each action contained in the Action Plan has been allocated to a lead Department. The lead Department will be responsible for meeting the financial costs associated with implementing each of its actions. It is anticipated that the final Rural White Paper Action Plan will be published in early 2012 following approval by the Executive.

Appointment of Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the status within her Department of the Department of Finance and Personnel's review of the appointment of Special Advisers.

(AQW 3687/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Responsibility for the appointment of Special Advisers remains with individual Ministers and should comply with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999.

Flooding Caused by Rivers Bursting Their Banks

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to provide compensation and support to people who have had their property damaged as a result of the flooding caused by rivers bursting their banks during the recent heavy rainfall.

(AQW 3810/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As a direct response to this latest flood event I have committed an additional £1m to Rivers Agency to assist with flood alleviation measures. In addition my executive colleague Alex Attwood, Minister for the Environment has announced the provision of emergency funds to assist local councils in providing assistance and support to householders affected by the recent flooding event. If further funding is required I would anticipate it will be an issue to be discussed by the Executive.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Cultural Tourism

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to promote cultural tourism between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

(AQW 3154/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Arts Council is currently working to coordinate a Literature Tourism Trail covering the north of Ireland and Scotland's Western region. There are strong links between literature development organisations here and their counterparts in Scotland. Similarly, other organisations supported by the Arts Council are active in developing such links. The NI Piping and Drumming School and the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association NI branch both have links into the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association and play a role in promoting tourism-led activities. Armagh Pipers Club has delivered an exchange programme with Piping Live in Scotland and Feis an Earraigh on the Isle of Skye.

Foras na Gaeilge along with Bòrd na Gàidhlig are responsible for the Colmcille project which has developed with HLF funding a Heritage and Tourism trail – Slí Cholmcille – from Glencolmcille in SW Donegal through Derry City, Limavady and the Mid Sperrins to Argyll and the Western Isles. This site will be launched on 10 November in Derry.

I recently launched a mobile app competition to promote cultural tourism by showcasing aspects of Ulster-Scots and Irish culture in time for the 2012 tourism season.

Content for the Ulster-Scots app is from a range of publications developed by the Ulster Historical Foundation and the Ulster-Scots Agency. Profiles have been developed on approximately 200 locations across the region with Ulster-Scots significance. These include villages, landmarks, castles and graveyards. The app will also allow users to explore thematic trails based on the Plantation and emigration and also hold information on Ulster-Scots family names.

The app will also provide information on local accommodation, restaurants and other attractions relevant to the sites and activities profiled by the apps. This aims to encourage tourists and visitors to travel and stay at locations across the north.

Association Football

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she will assist in the promotion of Association Football, from youth through to international level, over the next four years.

(AQW 3202/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for providing direct assistance towards the promotion of individual sports in the north of Ireland from youth through to international level, including Association Football. Sport NI has currently approved the following exchequer investment in Association Football over the next 4 financial years, and beginning in 2011/12, under its Sport Matters Community Capital programme:-

Organisation	Project	Award
Burnside Ulster Scots Society	3G football pitch with floodlights and changing facilities	£245,000
Moneyslane FC	Sand carpet grass football pitch; 3G and grass multi-use games areas with floodlights, pitch furniture, services etc	£245,000
Trustees of Kilcluney LOL 132	Construction of 3G football pitch (60m x 40m) with floodlights	£198,276
	Total	**£688,276**

As well as this assistance, Sport NI has awarded £400,000 of exchequer funding over the next 2 financial years to Association Football, under the Investing in Performance Sport Programme, to assist the development of talented players aged 12-16. In addition, Sport NI has agreed to provide, via its Athlete Support Programme, £25,000 of exchequer funding in this financial year towards the training and competition costs of Association Football's senior international women's team. Sport NI will also, over the next 4 years, be providing on-going advice and guidance to Association Football in a range of areas including governance, community relations, coach education, club development, facility development and spectator safety.

Furthermore, the development of an operationally viable and commercially sustainable stadium to help meet the needs of international Association Football remains a major priority for my Department. Approximately £25m of exchequer monies has been set aside over the next 4 financial years for this purpose.

Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) successful; and (ii) unsuccessful applications to the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund; and how the budget has been allocated since the commencement of the Fund.

(AQW 3294/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The funding for the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF) comes from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport via the British Film Institute and is administered by Northern Ireland Screen. I am informed by Northern Ireland Screen that, since the commencement of the USBF, there have been 12 successful and 39 unsuccessful applications and 2 applications have been deferred. £1,497,062 has been allocated since the commencement of the fund.

Irish Language Broadcast Fund

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) successful; and (ii) unsuccessful applications to the Irish Language Broadcast Fund; and how the budget has been allocated since the commencement of the Fund.

(AQW 3295/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The funding for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF) comes from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport via the British Film Institute and is administered by Northern Ireland Screen. I am informed by Northern Ireland Screen that, since the commencement of ILBF, there have been 183 successful and 124 unsuccessful applications. I am also informed that, until this year, the fund was broken down as follows - £2.5m per annum on projects and £250k on training.

Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she intends to provide additional funding to the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund so that it can fund a range of training initiatives for Ulster-Scots speakers, in the same way that the Irish Language Broadcast Fund funds training initiatives for Irish speakers working in the sector.

(AQW 3296/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Funding for the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF) comes from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport via the British Film Institute and is administered by Northern Ireland Screen.

I have been advised that there are currently no plans to widen the scope of the USBF to fund a range of training initiatives.

Film Tax Credits

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she intends to discuss extending Film Tax Credits for Children's television and television dramas with the relevant Departments.

(AQW 3313/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I understand that my predecessor wrote to the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries on this issue last year. The response stated that the Government does not believe there is a case for offering tax breaks, particularly in the current economic climate.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI fund this activity and therefore this is primarily an issue for them. However I am content to support any future discussions with the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries to help to boost local television production here.

Equality Impact Assessments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what the cost to her Department was in the 2010/11 financial year for carrying out Equality Impact Assessments.

(AQW 3317/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There were no Equality Impact Assessments undertaken by my Department in the 2010/11 financial year.

Arm's-length Bodies

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has (a) carried out any value for money audits on its arm's-length bodies its funds; and (b) identified any savings that could be made by these bodies.

(AQW 3331/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(a) My Department has carried out no value for money audits on its arm's-length bodies (ALBs). Value for money audits are normally carried out by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

However, my Department is participating in the ALB review being conducted centrally by the Budget Review Group to establish the scope for abolition, merger or absorption into departmental structures of each body. The Budget Review Group is expected to convey its recommendations to the Executive in due course.

My Department has also begun a more detailed review of its own ALBs. An initial exercise was completed in March 2011 which recommended a full review of a number of these; this will commence shortly.

(b) As part of the Budget 2010 exercise my Department and its ALBs were allocated budget reductions and savings have had to be found in order to live within these. My Department has already published details on its website of the savings required by the Draft Budget and will be updating these in line with the Final Budget in due course.

Ballymoney Library

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW1830/11-15, 1831/11-15,1832/11-15 and 1833/11-15, why the answers did not detail (i) the reasons for the proposed reduction in the opening hours of Ballymoney Library; (ii) the steps she has taken to safeguard the long-term future of Ballymoney Library; (iii) what weight she will attach to the responses to the public consultation on the proposed reduction in the opening hours of Ballymoney Library; (iv) what equality proofing has been carried out in relation to the proposed reduction in the opening hours of Ballymoney Library; and (v) if she will provide the infomation requested.

(AQW 3343/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Review of Library Opening Hours is the operational responsibility of Libraries NI. Ballymoney library is part of this overall review and it is not being treated in isolation.

The Board of Libraries NI determined, reluctantly, that in light of the budget settlement and the level of savings required, that it was preferable to reduce opening hours rather than close a substantial number of libraries

More detailed information regarding the consultation process is available on the Libraries NI website.

I would again emphasise that nothing has been finalised by the Libraries NI Board at this stage. I would encourage people to take part in the consultation which ends on 2 December 2011.

Department Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail her Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3363/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Details of spending in the Belfast City Council area for the financial years 2001/02 to 2010/11 are not readily available from the Department's financial systems.

The extraction of this information would require extensive manual analysis of financial records from this period and would result in disproportionate costs.

Ulster-Scots Agency: Board

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many members of the current Board of the Ulster-Scots Agency are from (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland; and whether this reflects the fact that Northern Ireland provides 75 per cent of the Agency's budget.

(AQW 3378/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The North/South Language Body board comprises 24 members appointed by NSMC, of those members, 16 are members of the Foras na Gaeilge Board and 8 are members of the Ulster-Scots Agency Board.

Both the Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency Boards have 50% of their membership nominated and appointed by the NI Executive and 50% by the Irish Government.

Appointment of Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the status, within her Department, of the Department of Finance and Personnel's review of the appointment of Special Advisers.

(AQW 3379/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for the appointment of Special Advisors remains with individual Ministers and should comply with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisors and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended

Fish Poaching in Inland Waterways

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 2252/11-15, what steps she is taking to (i) identify; and (ii) tackle the level of fish poaching in inland waterways in the Upper Bann constituency.

(AQW 3404/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL is concerned with any illegal fishing activity, which includes fish poaching, taking place throughout its operational area.

(i) It is difficult to identify the actual level of fish poaching in any constituency without precise and detailed information on the numbers and activities of poachers involved. My Department can only monitor trends on the level of poaching from the number of detections made and the number and length of illegal nets and long lines seized.

(ii) The Upper Bann constituency spans two DCAL operational areas with enforcement teams consisting of 3 and 2 Fisheries Protection Officers, each directed by a Senior Fisheries Officer. Additional resources from other teams may be brought in to assist in operations in the Upper Bann Constituency as and when required.

DCAL Fisheries Protection staff undertake regular patrols, including evenings and weekends, on land and water, throughout the Upper Bann constituency. They also carry out intelligence led operations to detect, disrupt and deter those involved in illegal fishing activities.

In addition Fisheries Protection Officers undertake inspections of fish dealers' premises and businesses selling fish such as hotels, restaurants and commercial outlets, to ensure that those engaged comply fully with the 1966 Fisheries Act and Fisheries Regulations.

DCAL Fisheries Protection staff also build relationships with local angling clubs, many of which have Private Water Bailiffs, who have similar enforcement powers and play an important role in supporting my Department in combating illegal fishing activities.

Cost of Answering Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the average cost to her Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3443/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

The rationale for this position has been previously set out by OFMDFM, as part of its written submission to the Procedures Committee on the cost of answering AQs, during the Committee's AQ Inquiry -

"The preparation of responses to Assembly Questions is an intrinsic part of the responsibilities of civil servants and has therefore not traditionally been separated out from other duties for a separate estimate of cost. Such costs, which would reflect only the departmental phase of processing the questions, would also vary in line with, for example, the nature of the question, the number of individual members of staff involved in preparing the reply and the involvement of other Departments in providing information."

Library Fines

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the process by which a person is banned from borrowing books from a library through having fines in excess of £10.

(AQW 3451/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The amount of stock not returned is of ongoing concern for Libraries NI who continue to undertake a number of measures to try and reduce the impact on the library service of stock loss. These can include for example contacting the borrower via text, e-mail or letter before and after the stock item is due for return.

In the course of accruing a fine in excess of £10 a borrower will have received at least one overdue notice.

Libraries NI have informed me that they have set the parameters on their automated library management system to automatically identify when a borrower has accrued a fine of £10 or more. As a result of this the borrower would be unable to borrow any further books or other items.

Public Library Standards

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any changes she proposes to make to the existing Public Library Standards.

(AQW 3452/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Public Library Standards form part of DCAL's policy framework for the public library service (entitled 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries') which was published in July 2006.

It is my intention to review the library policy framework in the near future to assess the extent that it has been successful in bringing about the desired improvement in the public library service.

I would then be in a position to consider if the Public Library Standards need to be updated.

Lisnaskea Library

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i), given that Libraries NI has already purchased the site for the Lisnaskea Library new build, when it proposes to begin the development; (ii) why the existing library at Lisnaskea is having its opening hours reduced; and (iii) whether the reduction

in hours of the existing library at Lisnaskea is an indication that the commencement of the new build is at risk.

(AQW 3501/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) The Project to provide a replacement library in Lisnaskea was already underway when it was suspended due to the 2011 budget settlement. The Project remains a priority for Libraries NI if funding were to become available.

(ii) The Review of Library Opening Hours is the operational responsibility of Libraries NI. Lisnaskea library is part of this overall review and it is not being treated in isolation.

The Board of Libraries NI determined, reluctantly, that in light of the budget settlement and the level of savings required, that it was preferable to reduce opening hours rather than close a substantial number of libraries

(iii) The Review of Opening Hours is unrelated to the Libraries NI capital programme.

Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the cost to her Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3503/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Implementation of the Departmental Equality Scheme is mainstreamed within the Department as part of the policy development process. The cost of equality duties are not maintained and cannot readily be disaggregated.

I trust you will find this information useful.

Sports: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 2961/11-15, to detail the funding allocated to clubs affiliated to the (i) Gaelic Athletic Association; (ii) Irish Football Association; and (iii) Irish Rugby Football Union in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3639/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of Exchequer and Lottery funding. In the last five financial years, Sport NI has allocated a total of £29,227,994 to clubs affiliated to the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Irish Football Association and the Irish Rugby Football Union. A breakdown of this funding is provided in the table below:

	GAA		**IFA**		**IRFU**	
Date	**Exchequer**	**Lottery**	**Exchequer**	**Lottery**	**Exchequer**	**Lottery**
2006/07	£1,848,283	-	£214,366	-	-	-
2007/08	£2,786,466	-	£807,163	-	-	-
2008/09	£3,999,228	-	£1,364,372	£1,880,017	£410,403	-
2009/10	£8,689,681	-	£3,925,414	£245,000	£208,680	-
2010/11	586,283	-	£2,173,534	-	£89,104	-
Sub total	**£17,909,941**	**-**	**£8,484,849**	**£2,125,017**	**£708,187**	**-**
Total	**£17,909,941**		**£10,609,866**		**£708,187**	

Olympic Sized Swimming Pool in Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans there are to use the olympic sized swimming pool in Bangor as part of 2013 World Police and Fire Games.

(AQW 3678/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Between 2 July 2010 and 29 July 2010 Sport NI completed an 'expression of interest' exercise (on behalf of the Stakeholder Group - the lead body prior to the formal establishment of 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited on 28 February 2011) to identify potential venues to host the sports events for the 2013 Games.

The Company has concluded its stage two assessments of the venue selection process (previously managed by Sport NI) and is now engaging in pre-contract negotiations with the shortlisted venues prior to the Board making final decisions. The negotiations are without prejudice.

The 50m pool in Bangor has been identified as the provisional venue for; `swimming`, `water polo`, and `toughest competitor alive` events in the 2013 World Police and Fire Games. The final list of venues will be confirmed in summer 2012.

Odyssey Trust Company Limited

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department's consent was sought and obtained by the Odyssey Trust Company for expenditure on the refurbishment of the corporate hospitality suites at the Odyssey Arena; and, if so, what level of expenditure was approved.

(AQW 3754/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Odyssey Complex has now passed its tenth anniversary and many items of fixtures, plant and equipment require updating.

The maintenance and/or refurbishment of areas within the complex is the full responsibility of the Trustees of the Odyssey Trust Company (OTC).

These Trustees seek to maintain the complex to an appropriate, fit for purpose, standard.

In the light of their charitable obligations, which are primarily funded from commercial activities, the Trustees must also consider how the Odyssey can provide a quality offering to meet the requirements of paying customers' and events organisers.

My Department does not direct, or intervene in, the OTC's schedule of planned maintenance and/or refurbishment.

Department of Education

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1980/11-15, whether his Special Adviser is in receipt of a salary and under which salary band his Special Adviser is being paid.

(AQW 2636/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The salary of DE's Special Adviser has yet to be finalised.

Enhanced Redundancy Package for Teachers

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of funding allocated for the enhanced redundancy package for teachers in the (i) 2011/12; (ii) 2012/13; and (iii) 2013/14 financial years.

(AQW 3205/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In order to deliver the efficiencies identified in my Savings Delivery Plan, £49.9 million has been set aside to support the Voluntary Severance Programme in 2011-12. This will facilitate a further streamlining of staff employed in central management and administration in the Arm's Length Bodies, as well as any proposals regarding teaching and non teaching staff based in schools. Further resources have been set aside for future years – the indicative allocations over the years 2012-13 to 2014-15 are £55.4/£50.6/£61.3 million; however, these may be subject to change.

These sums have not as yet been broken down between teachers, support staff and central management/administration. It will be a matter for employing authorities to agree the terms of any enhanced redundancy for teachers in light of the available resources. No funding has been allocated to date to the employing authorities for this process.

Private Sector Bus Companies

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what sanctions are available if private sector bus companies are in breach of regulations while having a contract to transport children to and from school.

(AQW 3286/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The sanctions available to Education and Library Boards are used according to the nature, severity and/or frequency of the offence.

In instances where the breach of the regulations, or the terms of a contract are relatively minor, for example, poor timekeeping, contractors may receive a formal warning and be given a set period during which they are required to improve.

Where a breach is more serious, bus-runs may be removed from the contractor. For example, where a vehicle breaks down and the contractor has no contingency in place - Boards will take immediate action where the health and safety of pupils is involved.

In the most severe cases Boards may terminate a contract entirely and/or remove them completely from the tender-select list. For example, this may occur where a contractor fails to meet the legal obligations with respect to their vehicle(s) or health and safety requirements.

Children: Statemented

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education how many children were statemented in each sector, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3290/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Pupils in schools with a statement of SEN by school management type, 2008/09 – 2010/11

School management type	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Controlled	7,689	7,682	7,785
Voluntary	347	417	466
RC Maintained	4,263	4,363	4,441
Other Maintained	90	91	95
Controlled Integrated	172	238	252
Grant Maintained Integrated	692	767	851
Total	**13,253**	**13,558**	**13,890**

Source: NI school census.

Note:

1. Figures relate to pupils in nursery, primary post-primary and special schools.

In addition to the numbers in schools listed above, there were: 18 statemented children in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres in 2008/09; 16 statemented children in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres in 2009/10; and, 8 statemented children in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres in 2010/11.

Computer Science

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education whether he will consider including a distinction in the curriculum between Information Communication Technology for using computers and Computer Science which examines how computers function.

(AQW 3306/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information Communication Technology (ICT) plays a central role in the revised curriculum. Using ICT is a cross-curricular skill in the curriculum. It is not a specified subject. The Using ICT cross-curricular skill, places emphasis on developing in young people a range of ICT competences and their use in practical applications across all areas of the curriculum ie it is embedded. These skills are important in everyday life.

Computer Science is distinct and is a specific and more specialised subject. The flexibility already in place within the revised curriculum enables schools to teach Computer Science in any Key Stage if they feel it appropriate.

Computer Science

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to include Computer Science in the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

(AQW 3310/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The revised curriculum has been designed to provide flexibility for schools to develop experiences that suit the needs of their pupils. Embedding mandatory, cross curricular skills and keeping prescribed content to a minimum, allows schools to choose the most appropriate approach to take with their pupils to ensure they are engaged and challenged to reach their full potential.

Computer Science typically includes the study of algorithms to solve computational problems, how computers process and store information and binary logic. It may also cover the study of programming languages. However, for the majority of young people at Key Stage 3 this is much more specialised than the skills they need as everyday users of ICT.

Using ICT, is a cross-curricular skill which is embedded in the curriculum and which places emphasis on developing in young people a range of ICT competences and their use in practical situations.

Although Computer Science is more specialised and likely to appeal to a smaller population, the flexibility in the revised curriculum does not preclude schools from teaching computer science at Key Stage 3 if they felt it appropriate.

Contract Lease iPads

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether he can offer an assurance that secondary school pupils whose parents do not enter into the three year contract lease for an iPad will not be disadvantaged or discriminated against.

(AQW 3341/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools have flexibility to determine how they deliver the revised curriculum in the classroom, and in doing so will use a variety of resources including ICT. The flexibility permitted will therefore result in different offerings of curriculum provision across schools.

Through the investment in C2k, schools are equipped with ICT services to meet the educational needs of all pupils. Where a school puts in place enhancements to the core provision, which may not be available to all pupils, I expect it to ensure that no pupil is thereby disadvantaged.

Contract Lease iPads

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether the use of iPads, contract leased by parents over three years, will lead to savings on books for (i) schools; and (ii) the Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 3400/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools are best placed to assess the needs of their pupils and it is a matter for schools themselves to reach a judgement on the resources, including books and ICT provision, they wish to use in their delivery of the curriculum. If they wish to enhance their ICT provision through an iPad lease scheme they may do so.

Whether a saving on books is made by a school or its area Education and Library Board as a consequence of the introduction of iPads, will depend upon how the school utilises the functions the iPads provided in the classroom.

Teachers: Sick Leave

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1857/11-15, how many of the 113 teachers who were on sick leave for a period of over three months during the 2010/11 school year are currently on sick leave again.

(AQW 3414/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Based on the latest data held 6 of the 113 teachers are currently on sick leave.

Draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education why he did not consult the Minister of Justice or his Department on the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy.

(AQW 3425/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy was launched for consultation on 25 June 2010 by my predecessor as Minister of Education. The Minister extended the consultation period, which was originally to end in November 2010, to 31 January 2011 due to the high level of interest.

Unfortunately, the Department of Justice was not included in the consultation for the draft Strategy as the Department of Education used a distribution list that had been prepared prior to the establishment of the Department of Justice. This is to be regretted.

It was the case however, that the consultation, and subsequent extension, was advertised in the general press and all MLAs, political parties, and the Assembly Business Office, were notified of the consultation process.

One of the key objectives of the draft Strategy is to encourage greater collaboration among key partners to promote greater integration in service delivery for young children. I will ensure, therefore, that my Department will work with other departments and agencies in the development and implementation of relevant policies and strategies.

Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3427/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department's original Equality Scheme was published in February 2001. A revised Scheme was issued for consultation in July 2011 and reflects the Equality Commission's revised Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010). The revised guidance arose from the recommendations of the Commission's Review of Effectiveness of the Duties in May 2007.

As Section 75 statutory duties are mainstreamed in policy making, the Department does not hold information on the cost of equality duties and could not readily disaggregate them.

Viability Audit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how the financial viability aspect of the current viability audit can be satisfactorily and fairly concluded in advance of the completion of the review of how schools should be funded; and when the review is due to be completed.

(AQW 3472/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The purpose of the viability audit is to make an assessment of all schools looking initially at enrolments, the quality of education provided and the financial viability projected over a number of years. The focus is therefore wider than a school's financial position. A key outcome of the viability audit is for early appropriate intervention in those schools that are evidencing significant stress, thereby protecting the interests of the pupils directly affected.

With regard to your specific question in relation to the review of school funding, as I outlined in my Statement to the Assembly on 26 September, I have asked that a review of the current Common Funding Scheme is undertaken, to ensure that funding arrangements are fit for purpose in our drive for a sustainable schools estate. I am not satisfied that the scheme adequately supports and is consistent with our policy objectives, nor that the current system is sensitive enough in targeting funding for TSN. This is a major piece of work and I have asked that this is completed to allow for consultation and implementation of eventual decisions from 2013-14.

South Antrim Area: School Bus Routes

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education what changes have been made to the school bus routes in the South Antrim area since the end of the 2010/11 academic year.

(AQW 3477/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the South Antrim area the only major changes have been to accommodate the merger of St Killian's, St Comgall's High School (Larne) and St Aloysius High School (Cushendall), and the removal of a Board bus from the run serving Templepatrick and Mallusk Primary Schools due to a decline in the number of pupils using the service.

Minor adjustments, such as the addition, removal, or relocation of pick-up/set-down points, may have been made to routes travelled by designated buses. These minor adjustments will have been required by the changing demography of pupils eligible for assistance with transport.

Bangor Grammar School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of the new build for Bangor Grammar School.

(AQW 3485/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Construction work on the new school for Bangor Grammar started on site in March 2011 and is estimated to be completed in February 2013. The current target cost is £15.123m which includes an element of non-grant aidable work which will be funded by the school authorities.

Belfast City Council: Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3496/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not hold the information in the format requested.

Framework for Language Teaching and Learning in Schools

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to introduce a framework for language teaching and learning in schools; and if so, whether the framework would ensure that all primary school pupils learn a foreign language.

(AQW 3512/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools are encouraged to offer a wider range of modern languages, and the recently introduced revised curriculum provides them with greater flexibility to do so. This includes scope for schools wishing to offer language learning at primary level, before it becomes a statutory requirement at Key Stage 3, and a qualification choice at Key Stage 4 and sixth form.

The revised curriculum has broadened the range of modern languages that schools can offer so that, instead of being limited to choosing from 5 languages as previously, schools are now able to choose any of the languages of the 27 EU member states to meet the minimum requirement, as well as any other additional languages they wish.

Modern languages are not a compulsory part of the statutory curriculum at primary level. The Department is however aware that there is a range of existing good practice in language learning. To help support primary schools wishing to offer modern language learning the Primary Language Programme was introduced in 2007 to give our youngest pupils the opportunity to learn an additional language in school. As at 30 June 2011, 416 schools were participating in the programme, with over 27,000 pupils each week benefiting from learning an additional language. Additional support and resources is also provided by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) for primary schools that wish to introduce an additional language.

Draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the work his Department has undertaken with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in relation to the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy.

(AQW 3521/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership was established in January 2011 and has recently published the Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14 for consultation. The Department of Education is currently considering the Plan.

The consultation on the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy ended on 31 January 2011 and the Department is currently considering the large volume of responses to that consultation. The focus of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is on ensuring the implementation of an integrated approach to the planning and delivery of services for children, which is one of the key objectives of the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy. As such, the Department, in considering the way forward for the Strategy, will wish to consider how it might align with the Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14.

Bangor Grammar School Sport Pitches

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether there are any plans for the community to use the new Bangor Grammar School sport pitches.

(AQW 3540/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has been advised by the School Principal that from the beginning of the design phase of the new Bangor Grammar School, community access was one of the most important underlying design principles and has greatly influenced the final configuration of its facilities.

The facilities of the school are used every night and at most weekends by community groups and the school intends to continue and develop this access not only in its new building, but also, where practicable, on the exterior pitches and courts.

Cost of Answering Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education to detail the average cost to his Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3547/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

The preparation of responses to Assembly Questions is an intrinsic part of the responsibilities of civil servants and has therefore not traditionally been singled out from other duties for a separate estimate of cost. Such costs, which would reflect only the departmental phase of processing the questions, would also vary in line with, for example, the nature of the question, the number of individual members of staff involved in preparing the reply and the involvement of other Departments in providing information.

Modern Languages

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education how many pupils have gained a grade A-C in a modern language at (i) GCSE; and (ii) A Level in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 3578/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

Number of GCSE entries in modern languages, 2000/01 - 2009/10			
Year	**Total achieving A*-C**	**Total entries**	**Percentage achieving A*-C**
2000/01	11,950	17,472	68.4
2001/02	12,190	17,463	69.8
2002/03	11,536	17,030	67.7
2003/04	11,356	16,829	67.5
2004/05	11,344	15,852	71.6
2005/06	10,557	14,913	70.8
2006/07	10,322	14,805	69.7
2007/08	10,011	13,563	73.8
2008/09	9,378	12,009	78.1
2009/10	9,305	11,574	80.4

Number of A level entries in modern languages, 2000/01 - 2009/10			
Year	**Total achieving A-C**	**Total entries**	**Percentage achieving A-C**
2000/01	1,169	1,626	71.9
2001/02	1,364	1,648	82.8
2002/03	1,162	1,444	80.5
2003/04	1,215	1,440	84.4
2004/05	1,124	1,309	85.9
2005/06	1,099	1,292	85.1
2006/07	1,141	1,294	88.2
2007/08	1,152	1,305	88.3
2008/09	1,117	1,254	89.1
2009/10	1,179	1,345	87.7

The data is sourced from the RM Data Solutions database of examination entries.

Within the years covered, GCSE and A level entries were made in the following subjects:-

Irish (excluding Gaeilge) French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Polish, Russian, Urdu, Modern Greek, Hindi, Japanese, Turkish or Persian.

Modern Language: A Level

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what action his Department has taken to encourage pupils to study a modern language at A Level.

(AQW 3579/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Currently modern languages are a statutory requirement at KS3 and a qualification choice at KS4 and Sixth form. Schools are encouraged to offer a wider range of modern languages, and the recently introduced revised curriculum offers schools more flexibility in the choices of subjects they can offer to meet the needs of their pupils.

The revised curriculum has broadened the range of modern languages that schools can offer so that, instead of being limited to choosing from 5 languages as previously, schools are now able to choose any of the languages of the 27 EU member states to meet the minimum requirement, as well as any other additional languages they wish.

Additionally the Entitlement Framework will guarantee all pupils equality of access to a broad and balanced range of courses with clear progression pathways at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Schools work in Area Learning Communities to best meet the needs of all the pupils in their area and are therefore able to provide access to a wider range of courses, including modern languages, at A Level.

Schools: Proposed Newbuilds

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to list the proposed newbuilds for schools which are at the feasibility and economic appraisal stage, including how long each new build has been at this stage.

(AQW 3591/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At this point I am not in a position to provide a list of proposed new builds for schools. I have indicated that no school capital building project will be looked at in isolation but within the context of the wider area plan.

I have made it clear that we need to move to a more strategic approach to planning and I have commissioned the Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with CCMS and other sector, to undertake this work.

The focus of area planning will be to determine the future needs of an area across all sectors and then to compare what is needed with what already exists to identify gaps and over provision.

Once the need is determined the school managing authorities will consider how best to meet that need. The emphasis must be on a network of larger sustainable schools and maximise the use of the existing estate.

Future capital investment will be targeted at supporting area plans. Until this work is completed I cannot comment on individual schools or on specific areas

Irish-medium Education Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on how recommendation 21 (i) of the Irish-Medium Education Report is being implemented.

(AQW 3618/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A Monitoring Group, chaired at Deputy Secretary level and including representatives from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta, has been established to oversee all matters on Irish medium education. This Group ensures that considerations relating to Irish medium education are embedded in the policy development process from the outset.

Our Lady of Lourdes High School, Ballymoney

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the areas of residence of pupils attending Our Lady of Lourdes High School, Ballymoney.

(AQW 3620/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

WARDS RESIDED IN BY PUPILS ENROLLED IN OUR LADY OF LOURDES – 2010/11

Ward name	Total pupils
Postcode unknown/ not provided/ not recognised	*
Agivey	*
Ballyhoe and Corkey	9
Benvardin	*
Bonamargy and Rathlin	*
Carnany	13
Central (Coleraine)	*
Clogh Mills	11
Cross Glebe	*
Dervock	*
Dundooan	*
Dunloy	47
Dunluce	*

Ward name	Total pupils
Dunminning	5
Fairhill	11
Glebe (Ballymoney)	5
Glenaan	*
Hopefield	*
Killoquin Lower	17
Killoquin Upper	11
Kilrea	*
Knockaholet	8
Knocklayd	*
Knocklynn	*
Moss-Side and Moyarget	*
Newhill	13
Portglenone	*
Ringsend	5
Route	8
Royal Portrush	*
Seacon	15
Stranocum	*
The Cuts	*
The Vow	13
Total	**191**

Source: NI school census

'*' denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the areas of residence of pupils attending Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle.

(AQW 3621/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

WARDS RESIDED IN BY PUPILS ENROLLED IN CROSS AND PASSION COLLEGE – 2010/11

Ward Name	Total pupils
Armoy	42
Atlantic	*

Ward Name	Total pupils
Ballyhoe and Corkey	99
Bonamargy and Rathlin	30
Carnmoon	*
Clogh Mills	14
Dalriada	129
Dervock	*
Dunloy	*
Glenaan	26
Glenariff	42
Glendun	39
Glenravel	*
Glenshesk	76
Glentaisie	79
Hopefield	*
Kinbane	31
Knockaholet	20
Knocklayd	109
Moss-Side and Moyarget	5
Route	*
Stranocum	15
Total	**770**

Source: NI school census

'*' denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on his recent visit to Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena

(AQW 3675/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I visited Castle Tower Special School on Thursday 6 October 2011. During my visit I toured several classrooms across two of the three campuses and met with some of those involved in the life of the school, including staff, parents, and pupils. I was very impressed with the hard work of everyone in ensuring the school makes a real difference to the lives of the young people who attend.

I recognise the challenges facing the staff at Castle Tower Special School, like many other schools, in providing a quality education in the school's current facilities. I have said in my statement to the Assembly on 26 September that we cannot rely solely on new build solutions to address the situation in many schools and I highlighted the need to move to more innovative and creative solutions to address current problems. While I will be working with my officials and the school managing authorities

to examine possible solutions to address accommodation issues, the challenging financial environment at present means I cannot say at this stage what the outcome of this work might be.

Appointment of Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to outline the status within his Department of the Department of Finance and Personnel's review of the appointment of Special Advisers.

(AQW 3691/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for the appointment of Special Advisers remains with individual Ministers and should comply with the Code of Practice in the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

St Paul's College, Kilrea

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the areas of residence of pupils attending St Paul's College, Kilrea.

(AQW 3699/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

WARDS RESIDED IN BY PUPILS ENROLLED IN ST PAUL'S COLLEGE, KILREA – 2010/11

Ward Name	Total pupils
Postcode unknown/ not provided/ not recognised	8
Agivey	16
Clogh Mills	*
Dunloy	18
Dunminning	7
Garvagh	34
Gulladuff	*
Killoquin Lower	14
Killoquin Upper	36
Kilrea	76
Maghera	*
Ringsend	46
Roeside	*
Seacon	*
Swatragh	31
The Vow	17
Upperlands	13
Valley (Magherafelt)	5

Ward Name	Total pupils
Total	**328**

Source: NI school census

'*' denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Free School Meals

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Education how many families are now eligible for Free School Meals since the scheme was extended in September of this year.

(AQO 641/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been informed by the Education and Library Boards that 4,105 additional children in 3,511 families are now eligible for free school meals since the scheme was extended to Key Stage 2 pupils in primary schools in September 2011. This figure is broken down as follows:

BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
803 children in 747 families	680 children in 607 families	668 children in 629 families	1,159 children in 805 families	795 children in 723 families

The Boards are continuing to process applications.

I am keen to ensure that those children who are entitled to free school meals have the chance to avail of a nutritionally balanced meal during the school day and I would therefore encourage all parents to claim their full entitlement to free meals and to the other associated benefits such as the school uniform grant.

Schools: Viability

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Education if he can give an assurance that the viability of small schools, particularly those in rural areas, will not be assessed solely on enrolment numbers.

(AQO 638/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the recent Adjournment Debate "Safeguarding Rural Schools" I highlighted that my focus is firmly on the quality of education that we provide for pupils in every school. I believe that pupils living in rural areas deserve quality education just in the same way as pupils in urban areas.

I appreciate the central place a school has for many communities – both rural and urban. But I believe that where there is a school, that school must be a good school. However any school, regardless of location, must be educationally viable, it must deliver a quality education to today's generation of young people.

As you are aware I have commissioned a viability audit of all schools to be completed by December 2011. The criteria to be used are enrolments, quality of education and financial stability. The focus is therefore not just numbers.

The Sustainable Schools policy, which provides the basis for this work, does take account of the particular needs of rural schools. The policy specifies six criteria to be used in assessing a school's educational viability. These are:-

- Quality Educational Experience;
- Stable Enrolment Trends;
- Sound Financial Position;
- Strong Leadership and Management;
- Accessibility; and

- Strong Links with the Community.

Prior to the publication of the Sustainable Schools policy in January 2009, my Department consulted with officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

It was also assessed against the Rural Development Council's rural proofing checklist set out in its report, Striking the Balance.

Education and Skills Authority

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education for an update on the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQO 639/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I remain committed to the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, for which the case remains as strong as ever.

I have raised the need for reform with political parties; Education and Library Boards; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; and stakeholders including the Commission for Catholic Education, the Transferor Representatives' Council, Trade Unions and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. Political agreement is required to allow me to bring proposals to the Executive as soon as possible.

Lifelong Learning: People with Learning Disabilities

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education if he would consider working with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister for Employment and Learning to develop a strategy to expand the opportunities for lifelong learning for young people with severe learning disabilities when they leave school at 19 years of age.

(AQO 640/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A good deal of collaborative work is already going on to progress this issue. The Department of Education chairs a sub-group of the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People which has been addressing the provision for children with special educational needs when they make their transition from school or college to employment, training or social care settings. The membership of the sub-group includes representatives from the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Employment and Learning as well as the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, the Department for Social Development, the Department of Justice and the Youth Justice Agency.

The sub-group has produced an action plan which has been approved by the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People. The work of the sub-group builds on actions previously developed through the publication of an Inter-departmental Report and Action Plan published in 2006 where a framework was developed that included a range of effective strategies and activities for implementation.

Continuous collaborative workings between DEL, DHSSPS and DE have enhanced life skills opportunities through:

- the employment of Health Trust and Education Transition Officers to ensure a person centred approach to alleviate the difficulties encountered by young people in relation to the healthcare aspect of the process;
- improved provision of advice and guidance on local employment opportunities, training opportunities or referral for special occupational assessment;
- an enhanced range of further education and training provision available by providing a suite of 'pre-vocational' education and training programmes for young people for whom current provision is not sufficiently tailored nor flexible in order to deal with the difficult transition from school to other provision;

- the development of a range of programmes aimed at assisting people leaving Special Schools to find suitable employment such as "Access to Work", "Employment Support", "Job Introduction Scheme" and "New Deal for Disabled People";
- the continuation of life skill courses with support available for those attending further education classes;
- an increase in social and personal development opportunities with community access officers.

Through partnership arrangements the Department for Employment and Learning career advisers, along with the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety transition officers are invited by Education transition officers to attend transition planning meetings of year 10 pupils and subsequent annual reviews to agree a range of programmes aimed at assisting pupils leaving Special Schools to find suitable employment.

Since this report was published, DE has provided the education and library boards with approximately £3.8m to improve the transition planning process through the appointment of education transitions co-ordinators and for appropriate life skills training for independent living.

In summary, this is an important issue and I will continue to work with Ministerial colleagues to enhance opportunities for these young people as they make there transition from school or college to adult life.

Rural Schools

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education whether he can give any guarantee to rural communities that they will continue to have a school in their locality.

(AQO 642/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the recent Adjournment Debate "Safeguarding Rural Schools" I highlighted that my focus is firmly on the quality of education that we provide for pupils in every school. I believe that pupils living in rural areas deserve quality education just in the same way as pupils in urban areas.

I appreciate the central place a school has for many communities – both rural and urban. But I believe that where there is a school, that school must be a good school. However any school, regardless of location, must be educationally viable, it must deliver a quality education to today's generation of young people.

As you are aware I have commissioned a viability audit of all schools to be completed by December 2011. The criteria to be used are enrolments, quality of education and financial stability. The focus is therefore not just numbers.

The Sustainable Schools policy, which provides the basis for this work, does take account of the particular needs of rural schools. The policy specifies six criteria to be used in assessing a school's educational viability. These are:-

- Quality Educational Experience;
- Stable Enrolment Trends;
- Sound Financial Position;
- Strong Leadership and Management;
- Accessibility; and
- Strong Links with the Community.

Prior to the publication of the Sustainable Schools policy in January 2009, my Department consulted with officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

It was also assessed against the Rural Development Council's rural proofing checklist set out in its report, Striking the Balance.

Cross-border Schools

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Education when his Department will begin work on the joint North-South survey into the demand for cross-border schools, as outlined in his recent North-South Ministerial Council statement.

(AQO 644/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My aim is to bring those proposals to the next education sectoral meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) which is likely to be in November or December. Subject to NSMC agreement, the survey will begin as soon as possible thereafter.

Belfast Education and Library Board: Educational Psychology Service

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of current Educational Psychology Service provision for primary schools in the Belfast Education and Library Board area.

(AQO 645/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board is responsible for the delivery of the Educational Psychology Service within its area and, as in all other Board areas, now employs a common time allocation model of service delivery. Using this system, each school has its own waiting list of referrals to the Board's Educational Psychology Service. It is, therefore, the schools which prioritise the pupils whom they deem to be most in need of assessment, usually through discussion with the Board's Educational Psychology Service. This model allows schools to appraise the needs of pupils on their waiting lists on an ongoing basis.

The Belfast Education and Library Board informs me the model they use also facilitates early intervention as more time is given to primary schools than to post primary schools and sufficient time is allocated to allow all children under compulsory school age to be assessed in a timely manner. It also takes account of school size with schools with more pupils receiving more time.

Whenever possible, flexibility is exercised and schools may get more time than the minimum allocated.

Preschool Education

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Review of Pre-School Education and when he expects to detail its findings to the Assembly.

(AQO 646/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I announced a review of the pre-school admissions process in June 2011.

A draft report is now ready for my consideration. Once I have studied the Report in detail I will set out the way forward.

See also question on page WA 123

Department for Employment and Learning

St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the annual running costs of (i) St Mary's University College, Belfast; and (ii) Stranmillis University College, Belfast for the last available financial year; and how much funding his Department provided to each college.

(AQW 3127/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): For both university colleges the last published financial statements were for the academic year 2009/10. The annual running costs declared in these accounts (excluding depreciation and interest payable), and the funding provided by the Department is shown overleaf:

	Stranmillis	St. Mary's
Expenditure 2009/10	**£m**	**£m**
Staff Costs	5.656	6.174
Other Operating Expenditure	3.902	2.563
Total Expenditure	9.558	8.737

DEL Funding 2009/10- £M	Stranmillis	St. Mary's
Total Funding (£m)	5.967	5.813

Shuttle Bus Service Between Belfast and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will discuss, with the Minister for Regional Development, the possibility of introducing a free shuttle bus service between Belfast and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown.

(AQW 3135/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has no plans to discuss the introduction of a free shuttle bus service between Belfast and the University of Ulster's Jordanstown campus. The University has stated that it and the Students' Union maintain ongoing communications with the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC), and Translink, regarding public transport issues related to all campuses. Translink attends all campuses at the beginning of each academic year to provide information on public transport to students, staff and other campus users.

In addition to the Belfast – Larne railway line, bus routes include the regular services that operate along the Shore Road and the Uni-Link service, which operates through stops between Botanic and the University of Ulster at Jordanstown during term time. Translink offers a Student Discount Card which provides discounted fares on these services.

My Department provides financial support for eligible Northern Ireland domiciled students which can be used to assist students with their day-to-day living costs, including travel. These consist of Maintenance Loans, Maintenance Grants and Special Support Grants.

In addition, University Support Funds can meet particular course and living costs which are not already being met by other grants. The support can assist students who are in financial hardship or who are contemplating leaving their course because of financial problems.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any financial pressures that have been identified by his Department as part of the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3214/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Employment Service is the area of Departmental spend that is most under pressure and reflects the economic conditions that prevail currently. The numbers presenting to the Employment Service have increased significantly and the Department has a statutory responsibility to provide a service to them. The Steps to Work Programme is the main vehicle to service delivery. The numbers mandated onto the programme rose from just under 13,000 in 2009/10 to nearly 21,000 in 2010/11 – and in addition to this there were 6,000 voluntary entrants. This is resulting in a sharp increase in the number of participants on the programme at any one time – up from 13,000 at the start of the current calendar year to over 16,000 in June. Given the continuing rise in unemployment it is unlikely that these pressures will abate – indeed they would be expected to grow. These rises are leading to a forecast year end pressure of £9.2m. The Department has bid for assistance to address this in October monitoring.

Given the overall impact of the economic downturn DEL has also bid for two further initiatives:

- £3m for Step Ahead 4-2, targeted at young people aged 18 to 24; lone parents; and those moving to JSA as part of the welfare reform agenda. This programme would provide up to 500 people with up to 6 month work experience in the community and voluntary, public and private sectors.
- £1m for Individual Place and Train, aimed at those people moving off Incapacity Benefit due to welfare reform. This programme would be aimed at helping those who need the most support to get back to work.

Integrating Colleges

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the reasons (i) for fully integrating Stranmillis University College with Queen's University, Belfast; and (ii) that there are no plans to fully integrate St Mary's University College, Belfast.

(AQW 3266/11-15)

Dr Farry: The decision to seek a merger with Queen's University was taken by the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College. The Governing Body believed that the best way to ensure the continuation of teacher education on the Stranmillis site was to seek a merger with Queen's University and to create a world class School of Education on the Stranmillis campus. I would point out that Stranmillis and Queen's are already academically integrated and Stranmillis is a College of Queen's University. The reasons behind the merger decision are laid out in the Business Case which the Governing Body commissioned. The Business Case is a public document and a copy can be obtained from the College's web site.

While St. Mary's University College is also a College of Queen's University, its Governing Body is responsible for its strategic direction and has not proposed a merger with Queen's University.

Department Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3365/11-15)

Dr Farry: Information relating to spend in the Belfast City Council area is not readily available for either the Department or its Non Departmental Public Bodies. To extract this information would require individual business areas to review their records and to do so would result in disproportionate costs.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any easements that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3373/11-15)

Dr Farry: As part of the monitoring round process, Departments are to declare easements of resources that are no longer required for the purposes for which they were granted. During the October monitoring round the Department for Employment and Learning did not identify any easements.

Cost of Answering Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the average cost to his Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3445/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

The rationale for this position has been previously set out by OFMDFM, as part of its written submission to the Procedures Committee on the cost of answering AQs, during the Committee's AQ Inquiry:

"The preparation of responses to Assembly Questions is an intrinsic part of the responsibilities of civil servants and has therefore not traditionally been separated out from other duties for a separate estimate of cost. Such costs, which would reflect only the departmental phase of processing questions, would also vary in line with, for example, the nature of the question, the number of individual members of staff involved in preparing the reply and the involvement of other Departments in providing the information."

Adult Apprenticeship Funding

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the changes to his Department's Adult Apprenticeship funding, whether he would consider granting discretionary payments to people who have already begun an apprenticeship course to allow them complete the course on the terms they were originally granted, including the employer incentive.

(AQW 3449/11-15)

Dr Farry: On 1 September 2011, I announced my intention to retain a 50% funding model for apprentices (aged 25 or over) in all skill areas. This funding model applies to all starts on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme from 30 September 2011.

In recognition of the significant number of adults already following an apprenticeship prior to the 30 September 2011, I made it clear that they would be transitionally protected in terms of funding. My Department will honour the funding commitment already made to these apprentices and will meet the cost of their directed training and employer incentive payments in full.

University of Ulster

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 2917/11-15, to detail the number of students from (i) Great Britain; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; (iii) other EU member states; and (iv) the rest of the world studying at each campus of the University of Ulster.

(AQW 3464/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of students from, Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, other EU member states and the rest of the world who have enrolled in the University of Ulster at (a) Belfast; (b) Coleraine; (c) Jordanstown; and (d) Magee campuses in each of the last five years is detailed below:

(A) BELFAST CAMPUS

Academic Year	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Other EU	Rest of World
2005/06	10	110	0	5
2006/07	5	100	5	0
2007/08	5	115	0	0
2008/09	10	135	5	10
2009/10	15	130	5	30

(B) COLERAINE CAMPUS

Academic Year	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Other EU	Rest of World
2005/06	400	855	100	225
2006/07	325	720	75	190
2007/08	325	725	55	175
2008/09	335	655	65	225
2009/10	355	675	50	205

(C) JORDANSTOWN CAMPUS

Academic Year	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Other EU	Rest of World
2005/06	130	915	65	260
2006/07	90	720	105	285
2007/08	140	850	100	180
2008/09	255	910	90	265
2009/10	210	1,420	90	325

(D) MAGEE CAMPUS

Academic Year	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Other EU	Rest of World
2005/06	30	770	25	50
2006/07	35	665	20	75
2007/08	45	650	10	55
2008/09	50	545	10	80
2009/10	50	585	5	85

Source: HESA

Notes:

(1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

(2) The latest available data are for 2009/10.

(3) The figures in the table above are for all years and levels of study.

English for Speakers of Other Languages

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to bring Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the United Kingdom in offering English for Speakers of Other Languages as an essential skill.

(AQW 3493/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is currently reviewing the policy for the provision of ESOL classes in Further Education colleges. In doing so, the policies operating in other parts of the United Kingdom will be examined and considered, along with recommendations which have been received from the OFMdFM Racial Equality Immigration Sub-Group. A decision as to how ESOL provision will be offered will be taken when this review is completed.

My Department continues to provide weighted funding for ESOL provision in Further Education colleges at the highest level in recognition of its importance to the local economy and in promoting social cohesion.

There is no cap on provision and the funding incentive has led to increased uptake and delivery in recent years. Mid-year data for the academic year

2010/11 shows that over £2.4m worth of ESOL provision for 4,146 enrolments was drawn down by the FE Colleges. This is an increase on the previous academic year.

University of Ulster Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 2963/11-15, to provide a breakdown of the number of (i) Protestant; and (ii) Roman Catholic (a) teaching; and (b) non-teaching staff at each campus of the University of Ulster.

(AQW 3637/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has provided the information attached at Annex A.

ANNEX A

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

ACADEMIC* STAFF EMPLOYED AT UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2011

Campus	Protestant	Catholic	Not Determined	Total
Belfast	42 37.8%	43 38.7%	26 23.4%	**111**
Coleraine	126 41.4%	110 36.2%	68 22.4%	**304**
Jordanstown	226 45.8%	196 39.8%	71 14.4%	**493**
Magee	36 20.2%	110 61.8%	32 18.0%	**178**
Total	**430 39.6%**	**459 42.3%**	**197 18.1%**	**1086**

* Academic staff includes all teaching staff and Part-time Lecturers, Heads of School, Deans, PVCs and VC.

NON-ACADEMIC STAFF EMPLOYED AT UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2011

Campus	Protestant	Catholic	Not Determined[1]	Total
Belfast	66 48.5%	54 39.7%	16 11.8%	**136**
Coleraine	463 62.2%	228 30.7%	53 7.1%	**744**
Jordanstown	549 66.5%	203 24.6%	74 8.9%	**826**
Magee	47 15.7%	218 72.7%	35 11.7%	**300**
Total	**1125 56.1%**	**703 35.0%**	**178 8.9%**	**2006**

OVERALL WORKFORCE AT UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2011

Campus	Protestant	Catholic	Not Determined[1]	Total
Belfast	108 43.7%	97 39.3%	42 17.0%	**247**
Coleraine	589 56.2%	338 32.3%	121 11.5%	**1048**
Jordanstown	775 58.8%	399 30.2%	145 11.0%	**1319**
Magee	83 17.4%	328 68.6%	67 14.0%	**478**

Campus	Protestant	Catholic	Not Determined[1]	Total
Total	**1555 50.3%**	**1162 37.6%**	**375 12.1%**	**3092**

"Not Determined" includes those individuals whose religious belief is Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, Buddhist, Other or no religious belief. Those who have declared no religious belief or have declared themselves to be neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic (and for whom we cannot make a determination using the Residuary Method) are also in this category. It also includes those employees for whom the data are missing.

Young People's Learning Agency

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why Belfast Metropolitan College has not registered with the Young People's Learning Agency so that students can access the professional development loans offered by a number of banks.

(AQW 3680/11-15)

Dr Farry: In order for a Learning Provider to register with the Young People's Learning Agency for the Professional and Career Development Loan scheme, it must have a prospective learner who wishes to study with the support of a Professional and Career Development Loan.

Belfast Metropolitan College has advised my officials that it has no record of any of its students wishing to apply for a Professional and Career Development Loan and for this reason it has not registered with the Young People's Learning Agency.

Campus Sporting Clubs

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether (i) the University of Ulster; and (ii) Queen's University funds or contributes to any sporting clubs which are active on campus; and if so, how much they have paid to each club in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3688/11-15)

Dr Farry: As these activities are not specifically funded by my Department, it does not hold the requested information. Therefore, you may wish to contact the universities directly for this information.

Universities: Research Funding

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to increase the share of research funding, particularly from within the European Seventh Framework Programme.

(AQO 624/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am totally committed to maintaining research funding at an appropriate level to enable our universities to fulfil their central role to develop and sustain a world-class research base in Northern Ireland. In the current academic year, my Department is providing £50.7 million in recurrent research funding to Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster.

The universities have a responsibility, particularly in the current fiscal climate, to use this investment to maximise the income they lever from external bodies such as the UK Research Councils and the European Commission.

With respect to the Commission's European Framework Programme, which supports industrially-relevant research and is open to businesses as well as to the universities, the policy lead in Northern Ireland is the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). However, in the context of the Barroso Taskforce, my Department is working very closely with DETI and other Northern Ireland Departments to achieve an increase of 20% in European funding over the next four years.

As the universities play a key role in drawing down these monies to Northern Ireland, my Department has established an "EU Framework Support Fund" of £80,000 to further stimulate these activities and

to complement the practical support DETI already provides through its dedicated Collaborative R&D Support Service based in Invest NI.

Workforce Development Forums

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the development of Workforce Development Forums.

(AQO 625/11-15)

Dr Farry: Workforce Development Forums were established initially as a result of the FE Strategy, "FE Means Business", to provide information on local skills needs and to ensure that provision in the colleges meets these needs.

I want to have a streamlined and accessible advisory infrastructure which articulates effectively the needs of employers. I will build on the recommendations in the report "Improving the Effectiveness of the Employment and Skills Advisory Infrastructure" from my Employment and Skills Adviser. Workforce Development Forums are a key part and they will

be considered in the review of this infrastructure.

Steps to Work: North Belfast

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the success of the Steps to Work programme in the North Belfast constituency.

(AQO 626/11-15)

Dr Farry: My assessment of the success of the Steps to Work programme in the North Belfast constituency is that the programme has indeed been successful in helping those out of work in this area to find employment. Since its introduction in September 2008 the programme has assisted over 900 people in North Belfast to move into work. Given the current economic backdrop against which the Programme has operated, job outcomes in North Belfast have been encouraging, despite the toughest recession in modern times.

DEL: Community Divisions

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline how community divisions impact on the work of his Department.

(AQO 627/11-15)

Dr Farry: The communal divisions in Northern Ireland impact upon many walks of life, including the provision of goods, facilities and services by both the public and private sector. These impacts include significant economic, financial and social costs. My Department and its agencies are affected like all others.

I anticipate that the deployment of shared future policy proofing will identify these issues in future policy making, allowing us to focus on potential mitigating actions.

ApprenticeshipsNI

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

(AQO 628/11-15)

Dr Farry: Apprenticeships play a vital role in ensuring that we have a better skilled, modern and dynamic workforce to drive our economy forward.

By providing people with the right skills and qualifications, apprenticeships improve business performance and increase the skill levels of the workforce.

The success of ApprenticeshipsNI is reflected in the current record occupancy figure of over 12,300 apprentices, which is an excellent achievement in these challenging economic times.

I remain committed to the delivery of Apprenticeships and this is evidenced further by retaining 50% funding for adult apprentices from October 2011, despite budgetary pressures.

Queen's University and Stranmillis University College: Merger

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed merger between Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQO 629/11-15)

Dr Farry: This is a question that has been asked recently. As the member will know, a public consultation was carried out on the proposal earlier this year and the responses received were discussed with the Committee for Employment and Learning. However, I have reserved my position as several key stakeholder groups have subsequently requested meetings with me to discuss the proposal. I have met with some groups but there are some key discussions that remain to be held. I expect to be able to make a decision and an

announcement on the way forward following these discussions.

DEL: Equality Training

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the equality training his Department regularly provides for its staff.

(AQO 630/11-15)

Dr Farry: Equality training is a key learning and development priority for staff in my Department, particularly for those involved in policy development and staff management. All staff complete:

- Diversity Now which is mandatory for all staff.
- DEL's on line Induction programme for all new staff which includes Equality.

In addition, according to their role, staff avail of a range of equality training courses provided by the Centre for Applied Learning, the generic course provider for the NICS. These courses include:

- An Introduction to Section 75.
- Equality Impact Assessment Workshop
- Public Consultation and Engagement in the Northern Ireland Context.
- Regulatory Impact Assessment
- Thinking Rural – training for Policy makers
- The Effective Manager - where equality is one of the topics covered.

North West Regional College: Strabane Campus

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he will honour his commitment, in the short to medium-term, in relation to investment for the North West Regional College, Strabane Campus.

(AQO 631/11-15)

Dr Farry: There is no change from the position notified to the Member in June 2011 (AQW 1251/11-15):

- that a bid had been made for Strabane in Budget 2010;
- that the bid had been unsuccessful; and
- that I would continue to include Strabane in my priorities.

To address the issue in the short to medium term, the College has secured temporary accommodation, from its own reserves, which currently satisfies the demand for teaching space in the Strabane area. I will continue to bid for resources for this project.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: Unspent Funding

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the £17.5 Million which InvestNI is returning to the Department of Finance and Personnel (i) for her assessment of whether this is as a result of falling business confidence, as stated by InvestNI, or the banks' unwillingness to lend, as stated by the First Minister; (ii) whether local banks have been unwilling to lend, and if so, which banks have refused lending to projects supported by InvestNI; and (iii) what pressure she and the Minister of Finance and Personnel have put on these banks.

(AQW 2974/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):

(i). The increased global economic uncertainty has given rise to a number of factors which have combined to suppress demand for Invest NI's support and resulted in the agency signalling the need to return £17.5 million.

Since the beginning of the current financial year uncertainty across global financial markets, caused by sovereign debt issues and a lack of confidence in national fiscal policies, has given rise to further global economic uncertainty. The effect for businesses across Northern Ireland has been a significant deterioration in market conditions and a subsequent weakening of demand. As a result, Invest NI has seen a number of its clients scaling back or postponing their investment plans, leading to a lower uptake of the agency's financial assistance than had originally been anticipated by Invest NI when budgets were allocated to it as part of the Budget 2010 process.

An unwillingness by banks to lend to businesses has been a further factor in the decrease in demand for Invest NI's support.

(ii). It would be inappropriate for me to single out any of the banks in particular. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that banks, both in Northern Ireland and across the UK, have shown an increasing reluctance to provide new lending to businesses as well as restricting existing loan and overdraft facilities.

A stable and competitive banking sector that meets the needs of businesses and individuals is vital for economic recovery in Northern Ireland. Indeed, access to finance is recognised as a key issue which cuts across a number of areas in the emerging Economic Strategy. This is being developed by an Executive sub-committee on the economy, which I chair, and is scheduled for full consultation later in 2011.

(iii). Banking is a reserved matter and, as such, my Department has no statutory control of the banking sector. However, I and my officials have met with the main banks in Northern Ireland to emphasise the importance of supporting business development and growth. These discussions have included encouraging banks to promote, where appropriate, the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme and also stressing the importance of communicating clearly to business customers in relation to lending decisions.

The DFP Minister has also met local banks on a number of occasions in recent months mainly focusing on the current economic context, the state of the financial sector and the property market, bank lending and the implementing of the business finance task force recommendations to improve the services that banks provide to their customers. He is due to meet the governor of the Bank of England, Sir Mervyn King, in November to discuss banking issues as they relate to Northern Ireland.'

Infastrata PLC and eCORP Oil and Gas UK Ltd

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2459/11-15, to detail the practical implications of the work programme of (i) Infastrata PLC; (ii) eCORP Oil; and (iii) Gas UK Ltd in years (a) one; and (b) two.

(AQW 2990/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The practical implications of the work programme on Petroleum Licence PL1/10 in Years One and Two, listed in the answer to AQW 2459/11-15, are that items i), iii), iv) and v) consist of desk analyses. Item ii) comprises a seismic reflection survey where data is acquired using Vibroseis trucks along roads, and the subsequent processing and interpretation of this data. The aim of the work programme is to assess the hydrocarbon potential of the licence area and to identify a viable drilling target for conventional oil or gas within the Permo-Triassic sandstone reservoir rocks.

Corporate Bonds

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to ensure that local businesses benefit from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's plans to supply a credit line to small and medium sized enterprises through the use of corporate bonds.

(AQW 2993/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Full details of the "Credit Easing" scheme announced by the Chancellor, George Osborne MP, at the recent Conservative Party Conference are unlikely to be available until the Chancellor's autumn statement in November.

It is however understood that the intention is to provide support for lending into parts of the economy that need it most such as small businesses. The Finance Minister has continuously highlighted the need to make credit available to SMEs and he will also press the Government and the Bank of England to make sure that the Credit Easing measure announced by the Chancellor is applied in Northern Ireland.

I and my officials have met with the main banks in Northern Ireland to emphasise the importance of supporting business development and growth. Furthermore, my Department, through Invest NI, continues to develop and implement an Access to Capital Strategy which seeks to support the availability of capital within the local SME market.

Access to finance is recognised as a key issue which cuts across a number of areas in the emerging Economic Strategy. This is being developed by an Executive sub-committee on the economy, which I chair, and is scheduled for full consultation later in 2011.

Invest NI: Unspent Funding

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the amount of unspent funding that InvestNI has returned to the Department of Finance and Personnel, to detail the (i) number; (ii) scale; (iii) location; (iv) business sector; and (v) projected number of employees of the projects for which this funding was intended.

(AQW 3002/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Over the last few months, Invest NI has witnessed a number of projects being delayed as companies seek to minimise the impact of the economic downturn on their core business. Around 20 – 25 large value projects have had the most significant impact on the funding that has been returned. The projects were located across Northern Ireland and covered a wide range of sectors including Business Services, ICT, Financial Services, Food and Print and Packaging. Given that these projects are at varying stages of implementation, initial estimates suggest that the creation of approximately 900 new jobs may have been delayed.

NI Screen

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding her Department has allocated to NI Screen in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3047/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department through Invest NI is the largest single funder of NI Screen and over the past five years has committed £25.7m to the development of the screen industries in Northern Ireland; this includes funding of £6.3m for the current year 2011 – 2012.

INVEST NI SUPPORT TO NI SCREEN 2007 – 2011

Financial Year	2007 - 2008	2008 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	Total
Total Investment (£)	3,235,985	12,070,114	4,104,229	6,300,000	25,710,328

Directive 200/35/EC

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the date (i) when Directive 200/35/EC was fully transposed into legislation; and (ii) by which Directive 2011/7/EU will be fully transposed into legislation.

(AQW 3071/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Directive 2000/35/EC was fully transposed into legislation extending to England, Wales and Northern Ireland by the Department of Trade and Industry on 7 August 2002.

This Directive is scheduled to be replaced by Directive 2011/7/EU which is required to be transposed into legislation by 16 March 2013 at the latest. Any required revision to legislation currently in force will also be extended to Northern Ireland.

McIldoon Report on Energy Prices

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to re-examine the McIldoon report on energy prices.

(AQW 3094/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department has no plans to re-examine the McIldoon Report.

The report conclusions in relation to wider energy policy, where relevant, were considered in the development of the Strategic Energy Framework.

McIldoon Report on Energy Prices

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made on the implementation of the recommendations contained within the McIldoon report on energy prices.

(AQW 3095/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The McIldoon Report was commissioned by the Utility Regulator, and I understand that the Report recommendations have been considered and actioned where appropriate.

The McIldoon Report also included some comments on aspects of wider energy policy, and where relevant, these were considered in the development of the Strategic Energy Framework.

Invest NI

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money InvestNI has used to assist businesses (i) in the Greater Belfast area; and (ii) outside Belfast in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3099/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the last five financial years, Invest NI offered (i) £250 million of assistance to businesses located within the Greater Belfast Area and (ii) £363m to business outside that area. Table 1 shows the amount of Invest NI assistance offered to businesses in these areas in each of the last five years.

TABLE 1: INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED IN GREATER BELFAST AND OUTSIDE GREATER BELFAST (2006-07 TO 2010-11)

	Assistance Offered (£m)	
Fin Year	**Greater Belfast**	**Outside Greater Belfast**
2006-07	38.36	53.02
2007-08	40.61	65.63
2008-09	56.58	78.15
2009-10	68.59	110.80
2010-11	45.85	55.70
Total	**249.98**	**363.31**

NOTES:

1 Figures do not include £19.8m of assistance offered to projects for which this level of detail is not available.

2 Greater Belfast has been defined as the four Belfast Parliamentary Constituency Areas - North, East, South and West.

3 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

4. Table totals may not add exactly due to rounding.

It should be noted that Invest NI grant support is offered at the start of a project based on a company commitment to deliver a specific set of project based targets. In certain instances the company may not be able to fully deliver on these targets; therefore, not all of the assistance offered by Invest NI will be paid to the company.

Energy Framework

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has given any consideration to modifying the Energy Framework to militate against energy companies making exorbitant profits.

(AQW 3110/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I assume that the Member is referring to the regulatory framework, and in respect of this, I have no plans to modify the current regulatory framework for energy.

Effective regulation does not mean preventing energy companies from making profits but, where energy companies have a monopoly or near-monopoly, there is a need for regulation to ensure that electricity and gas tariffs are fair to consumers. Companies must be able to recoup their costs and make an acceptable profit to ensure ongoing investment and maintain our security of energy supply.

Government Sponsored Investment Bank

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she would consider establishing a Government sponsored investment bank which would support local small and medium sized enterprises and mitigate the reluctance of commercial banks to engage in lending.

(AQW 3111/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Responsibility for banking is not a devolved matter and establishing a Government sponsored investment bank represents a form of state aid, and may not be considered the most appropriate or practical mechanism for improving access to finance for local businesses.

I and my officials have met with the main banks in Northern Ireland to emphasise the importance of supporting business development and growth. Furthermore, my Department, through Invest NI, continues to develop and implement an Access to Capital Strategy which supports the availability of capital within the local SME market.

The Finance Minister has also been liaising with the UK and Irish Governments, the regulatory authorities, the local banks and the British Bankers Association (BBA) to stress the strategic importance of a competitive local banking sector here that meets the needs of both consumers and businesses, and the need for availability of bank lending on a competitive basis to local SMEs.

Peak Oil

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the comments made by the International Energy Agency's chief economist, who stated that peak oil was reached in 2006; and to outline what plans her Department has put in place to deal with this issue.

(AQW 3114/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While oil continues as an important part our energy mix, we all recognise it is not a finite resource. My Department's energy policy, as defined in the 2010 Strategy Energy Framework, is to shift the balance in the NI energy mix away from dependence on fossil fuels to increased levels of renewable energy, and the new infrastructure needed to achieve the goal of 40% of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2020. This is consistent with UK Government and European Union aims for diversifying energy sources.

Invest NI: Offices

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the annual running costs of each of InvestNI's fourteen offices worldwide in each financial year since 2006/07.

(AQW 3122/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI operates a network of overseas offices which are responsible for inward investment, trade development and technology development activities. In addition, a number of offices have operated within the timeframe of this question but have since been closed.

The table below represents that annual cost of each office that Invest NI has operated in the five year period from 2006-07 to 2010-11:

	2006-07	**2007-08**	**2008-09**	**2009-10**	**2010-11**
Office	**Annual cost (£)**	**Annual cost (£)**	**Annual cost (£)**	**Annual cost (£)**	**Annual cost (£)**
London	894,609	1,086,782	1,133,074	1,149,186	930,101
Brussels	222,829	251,375	330,444	394,123	231,171
Dublin	154,744	133,178	188,249	228,298	219,129

Office	2006-07 Annual cost (£)	2007-08 Annual cost (£)	2008-09 Annual cost (£)	2009-10 Annual cost (£)	2010-11 Annual cost (£)
Boston	1,255,349	1,165,671	1,570,747	1,617,168	1,546,215
New York	220,077	218,802	331,092	336,383	349,618
San Jose	186,916	205,914	292,219	318,431	453,171
Denver	98,100	102,986	137,174	24,695	0
Dusseldorf	572,018	356,764	463,726	199,658	226,028
Dubai	152,329	156,544	200,687	274,385	225,759
Mumbai	0	65,103	118,581	170,467	127,776
Tokyo	115,182	46,591	27,297	31,323	38,313
Seoul	197,703	107,496	80,220	76,635	73,500
Shanghai	0	141,691	231,338	210,342	193,538
Taipei	175,144	44,348	0	0	0
Singapore	73,000	65,000	0	0	0
Atlanta	6741	0	0	0	0
Total	**4,324,741**	**4,148,245**	**5,104,848**	**5,031,094**	**4,614,319**

Notes:

1. Annual cost comprises staff costs, office running costs and in-market activities attributed to that office across inward investment, trade development and technology development activities.
2. Table totals may not add due to rounding.
3. Trade costs in China and Taiwan have been charged to the Shanghai office only and cannot be disaggregated.
4. Inward investment marketing costs for the US market have been charged to the Boston office only and cannot be disaggregated.
5. Inward investment marketing costs for the London and Brussels offices have been charged to the London office only and cannot be disaggregated.
6. The above figures do not include the cost of marketing activities undertaken by the HQ based International Marketing team. These activities benefit all overseas offices and cannot be split by office or region.
7. Two offices, Toronto and Jeddah, have opened in the current (2011-12) financial year and as a result no figures are included.

Invest NI: Unspent Funding

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to ensure that further funds are not surrendered to the Department of Finance and Personnel in future Monitoring Rounds in this financial year, given that InvestNI has identified additional reduced requirements of £14m.

(AQW 3131/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI and Invest NI have been taking a number of proactive steps to specifically look at how companies can be supported in the short-term given the extent of the current economic uncertainty. This includes a comprehensive range of measures within the Boosting Business Initiative.

A number of themes have been identified against which potential actions can be implemented quickly to help boost business through jobs, exporting, research and development, new technology and skills. The full range of associated activities will be launched in the coming weeks.

Invest NI has not identified additional reduced requirements of £14m. It did however specifically highlight in its October Monitoring return that there were risks around the level of expenditure in a number of Capital projects which taken together have been forecast to spend £14m.

Waste Water Heat Streams from Factories and Power Plants

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given to harvesting the waste water heat streams from factories and power plants as a heat source.

(AQW 3155/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Businesses should capture waste heat where it is cost effective to do so, and Invest NI provides a wide range of resource efficiency advice and support to help business across the areas of energy, waste, water and raw materials - including help to identify opportunities to capture heat from waste streams.

The recovery and re-use of heat available from waste streams, either liquid or gas, is an energy efficiency measure that would be highlighted in surveys and audits of individual businesses by the Carbon Trust - and by Invest NI's technical experts who, if appropriate, can provide advice to those companies with energy bills of less than £30k per annum.

As well as the energy and resource efficiency advice that is open to all businesses through nibusinessinfo.com, Invest NI can also provide appropriate businesses with free, resource efficiency audits of water, waste and raw materials to highlight cost reduction opportunities. It also can offer five days of (free) consultancy support to help appropriate businesses move from awareness of efficiency opportunities to the point where they are in a better position to implement projects.

In addition, Invest NI funds the Carbon Trust to manage an Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme that can provide businesses with 0% interest, and unsecured loans of between £3,000 and £100,000 to help businesses finance and invest in appropriate energy saving projects.

Power stations can also produce large quantities of waste water, but this can be at low temperatures, hence harvesting waste heat from this resource would have to be economically viable.

Causeway Coast: Quality Hotels

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she plans to promote the establishment of quality hotels on the Causeway Coast to assist in attracting major golf tournaments to the area.

(AQW 3203/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Giant's Causeway, Antrim and Causeway Coast have been identified as one of the five signature projects capable of delivering international standout for Northern Ireland. The new world class visitor centre will give another major reason to visit the area.

It is recognised that the great potential offered by golf on the north coast in parallel with the development of the new Causeway Centre bodes well for the future of tourism in the area.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has commissioned Oxford Economics to model future need for tourist accommodation, aligned to future demand and the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020. This work is underway. It is expected however that this will confirm a need for development along the Causeway Coast.

NITB is working with key stakeholders to explore the possibility of holding a major golf event in line with the draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020. NITB has been investigating the feasibility of securing the Irish Open in 2013 or 2014.

While acknowledging the opportunity that a major golf tournament would offer to the area it is important to recognise that scale of such events has a major impact on accommodation demand well beyond the immediate area.

The construction of a 21 bedroom boutique hotel in Portstewart is underway and is due to be completed end of 2011/early 2012. Invest NI is also currently in discussions with a number of promoters who are looking at the opportunity to develop hotel projects on the north coast.

I have also met with the representatives of the Runkerry project, a 5 Star hotel development for the North Coast and have been supportive of this project.

Fracking

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many letters have been received by her Department regarding the potential use of fracking in Fermanagh; and for her assessment of the correspondents' perception of fracking.

(AQW 3211/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has received 16 letters concerning fracking.

I understand the genuine concern that people feel regarding the potential use of Hydraulic Fracturing and my Department will continue to monitor the situation very closely.

Fracking

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she has informed herself of the potential dangers to the environment and the economy should fracking take place in Fermanagh.

(AQW 3212/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As with all matters I am advised by my officials, in this case in particular by those from Minerals and Petroleum Branch, who administer the petroleum licensing system, and the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, who have considerable professional knowledge of shale gas exploration and production.

Department of the Environment

Article 21 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how many Public Rights of Way have been asserted by each local council, following Article 1 of the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983; and (ii) the total length of these Rights of Way.

(AQW 2692/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): While the question refers to Article 1 it is Article 3 that places each district council under a duty to assert public rights of way and to compile and preserve maps of public rights of way in its district. Councils do not have any requirement to report to the Department on delivery. This question has however been referred to the councils, all of whom have replied. It has not been possible to verify that each council has interpreted the question in the same way nor to confirm the accuracy of the figures supplied.

Under Article 3 of the Access Order 22 councils report that they have asserted 240 Public Rights of Way, with a total length of 245.2km. A breakdown of the responses by council follows.

Council	Number PROWs (asserted) - Article 3	Length (km)
Antrim	5	5.1
Ards	19	13.5
Ballymena	7	18.6
Ballymoney	1	0.1
Banbridge	23	24.1
Belfast	2	0.3
Carrickfergus	3	1.2
Castlereagh	9	6.4
Coleraine	7	1.5
Craigavon	4	3.2
Derry	8	11.7
Down	67	71.4
Larne	2	0.5
Limavady	1	0.3
Lisburn	2	2.0
Magherafelt	9	18.9
Moyle	5	4.9
Newry and Mourne	45	36.0
Newtownabbey	7	2.5
North Down	6	4.9
Omagh	5	16.6
Strabane	3	1.4
Total	**240**	**245.2**

Article 21 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how many Public Path Creation Agreements have been entered into by each local council, following Article 11 of the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983; and (ii) the total length of these public paths.

(AQW 2693/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Article 11 applies to councils and they do not have any requirement to report to the Department on delivery. This question has however been referred to the councils, all of whom have replied. It has not been possible to verify that each council has interpreted the question in the same way nor to confirm the accuracy of the figures supplied.

Under Article 11 of the Access Order twelve councils report that they have entered into 24 Public Path Creation Agreements with a total length of 59km. A breakdown of the responses by council follows.

Council	Number Paths created by agreement - Article 11	Length (km)
Ards	1	0.05
Ballymena	1	0.50
Ballymoney	1	8.85
Banbridge	1	0.16
Belfast	1	0.25
Coleraine	2	1.70
Cookstown	4	12.80
Down	2	2.35
Dungannon	1	0.02
Lisburn	2	10.00
North Down	6	11.65
Omagh	2	10.65
Total	**24**	**58.98**

Article 21 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many Public Path Creation Orders have been made by each local council, following Article 12 of the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983; and (ii) the total length of these public paths.

(AQW 2694/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Article 12 applies to councils and they do not have any requirement to report to the Department on delivery. This question has however been referred to the councils, all of whom have replied. It has not been possible to verify that each council has interpreted the question in the same way nor to confirm the accuracy of the figures supplied.

Under Article 12 of the Access Order five councils report that they have made 16 Public Path Creation Orders with a total length of 8.7km. A breakdown of the responses by council follows.

Council	Number Paths created by Order - Article 12	Length (km)
Belfast	5	0.3
Carrickfergus	0	0.0
Castlereagh	9	6.4
Moyle	1	1.0
North Down	1	1.0
Total	**16**	**8.7**

Article 21 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many proposals for long distance routes have been considered by his Department, under Article 21 of the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983; and (ii) the number and total length of the long distance routes created.

(AQW 2695/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the last ten years one proposal for a long distance route was submitted to and approved by the Department under Article 21 of the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983. There are alternative non-statutory approaches to recognising long distance routes. Currently there are 452 km of long distance walking routes incorporating nine Waymarked Ways, the Ulster Way, the North Down Coastal Path and the Lagan Towpath.

Article 27 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether each local council has carried out consultation on the extent of the open countryside in its area, following Article 27 of the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983; and (ii) to detail the areas of open country identified.

(AQW 2696/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Article 27 applies to councils and they do not have any requirement to report to the Department on delivery. This question has however been referred to the councils, all of whom have replied. It has not been possible to verify that each council has interpreted the question in the same way.

Six councils responded that they have formally consulted on the extent of open countryside in their area under Article 27. They have provided varied information about the areas of open countryside identified as follows.

Council	Carried out consultation on the extent of Open Countryside Article 27? Yes/No	Details provided of the areas of open country identified
Antrim	YES	Consultation was carried out during the development of ABC's Countryside Recreation Strategy in 1998. This has now been superseded by a more holistic approach to recreation (including countryside) as defined within the present Recreation Strategy.
Ballymena	YES	In relation to long distance routes in the countryside, Ballymena area includes Antrim coast & Glens AONB

Council	Carried out consultation on the extent of Open Countryside Article 27? Yes/No	Details provided of the areas of open country identified
Ballymoney	YES	Potential open country has been identified at; Slieveanorra, Garry Wood/Bog and Craigs Wood under the ownership of Forest Service. Long Mountain, Dunloy under private ownership. Lower Bann Valley under private ownership, and Black Hill/ Croaghan and Antrim Coast & Glens AONB area under private ownership.
Derry	YES	Council has published the Derry-Londonderry Access Plan 2009 – 2014 (www. derrycity.gov.uk/access) which examines the extent of access opportunity in the open countryside. Consultations with DARD, Forest Service, Woodland Trust etc identified areas including: a. Forest Service properties esp. Learmount Forest b. Woodland Trust properties incl. Killaloo, Oaks, Prehen and Burntollet c. NIEA (Natural Heritage section) properties incl. Ness and Ervey Woods d. NIEA (Built Heritage section) properties incl. Ballygroll e. Historical monuments in private ownership throughout the district f. Sperrin Mountains from Sawel to Park village g. River Faughan from Park Village to Lough Foyle

Council	Carried out consultation on the extent of Open Countryside Article 27? Yes/No	Details provided of the areas of open country identified
Larne	YES	In 1997, the Council compiled an access strategy Consultation was carried out at that time to ascertain the public's need and how land in this area would meet that demand. A long distance walking route (Ulster Way and Antrim Hills Way) going in a north/south direction across hills on the eastern side of the borough and west/east towards Slemish in Ballymena Council and south towards Newtownabbey Council area, has been in place for over 20 years.
Moyle	YES	Knocklayd Mountain Ulster Way/Moyle Way – 20 mile pathway from Ballycastle to Waterfoot over forest, farmland, mountains and river valleys. Ulster Way/Causeway Coast Way – Coastal pathway from Runkerry Beach to Carrick a rede Rope Bridge.Glenariff River Walk. Cushendall River Walk. Tow River Walk. Millennium Riverside Park. Armoy Riverside Park. Tramway Walk – Bushmills to Giant's Causeway – Runkerry Hinterland Ballycastle to Fairhead (de facto access) Ballycastle to Carrick a rede coastal route (not achieved) Ballycastle to Cushendun Old Coach Roads (de facto access) Tievebulliagh/Trostan Mountains (de facto access) Lurigethan Mountain (de facto access) Ballycastle to Armoy Old Railway Line (not achieved)Garron Plateau (de facto access) Glenariff Forest to Waterfoot disused mineral Railway (not achieved) Ballycastle Forest Ballypatrick Forest Glenariff Forest

Local Councils: Number of

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how; and (ii) when he will progress work on reducing the number of local councils from twenty-six to eleven,

(AQW 2703/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have been carefully considering the way forward with the reform of local government including the reduction in the number of councils. In doing so I have taken account of the views expressed by local government representatives and other key stakeholders.

I now intend bringing a comprehensive and integrated package of proposals to the Executive on all the key issues. These include the number of councils, boundaries, the implementation timetable, the integration of reform with the sector's improvement, collaboration and efficiency programme and the provisions for inclusion in the Local Government Reorganisation Bill which will impact on every aspect of the operation of councils. I am committed to doing so, soon, in order to provide the certainty that is required across local government and government Departments that propose to transfer functions to it.

I believe that this inclusive and integrated approach to local government reform is necessary to ensure that it is successful and that high quality, effective and efficient services are provided to ratepayers. As this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to reorganise local councils, it is important that time is taken to ensure that the right and best choices are made.

Capital Resources

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what capital resources are surplus to requirements in his Department.

(AQW 2715/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the current financial year the Department has surplus capital resources of £0.4 million arising from the slippage in the delivery of Roe Valley Hydro Electric Scheme project. As the funding for this project arises from the Executive's ring-fenced Invest to Save Initiative, these resources have been returned to DFP in the October Monitoring Round.

Resource Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the level of the resource grants for each District Council in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2736/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The level of the resources element of the general grant allocated to each District Council in each of the last five years is set out in the table below.

	General Grant Resources				
	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
District Council	£	£	£	£	£
Antrim	0	0	0	0	0
Ards	1,435,528	1,193,565	886,455	835,126	833,877
Armagh	1,616,643	1,617,037	1,615,563	1,567,840	1,529,979
Ballymena	0	1,939	0	0	11,646
Ballymoney	1,069,768	1,118,710	1,087,188	1,032,567	1,054,727
Banbridge	1,231,275	1,104,630	1,072,464	1,037,637	1,066,844
Belfast	0	0	0	0	0

District Council	General Grant Resources				
	2007/2008 £	2008/2009 £	2009/2010 £	2010/2011 £	2011/2012 £
Carrickfergus	511,880	608,586	653,040	581,566	580,088
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	987,971	851,627	665,130	618,262	521,029
Craigavon	903,470	645,762	970,527	968,275	1,032,306
Derry	1,402,830	1,299,086	1,371,381	1,370,642	1,316,270
Down	1,847,118	1,757,243	1,528,437	1,445,679	1,335,200
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1,096,781	972,805	948,033	951,896	802,572
Fermanagh	1,604,221	1,480,862	1,258,804	1,125,316	885,858
Larne	201,431	237,244	212,217	111,789	79,432
Limavady	1,493,009	1,444,168	1,341,942	1,318,671	1,261,120
Lisburn	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt	1,391,643	1,213,322	1,174,811	1,109,458	1,064,479
Moyle	624,107	602,314	581,278	510,448	468,250
Newry & Mourne	2,079,148	1,983,190	1,664,227	1,660,626	1,503,192
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	0
North Down	0	0	0	0	0
Omagh	1,534,039	1,445,936	1,452,552	1,377,870	1,216,020
Strabane	2,121,019	2,001,032	2,012,951	1,873,332	1,764,111

Proposed Capital Spend Projects

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his Department's proposed capital spend projects for this financial year, including the projected timescales and the costs for each project.

(AQW 2756/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Table 1 below outlines the various departmental capital projects, including projected costs and timescales, to be undertaken by the Department in this financial year.

For some of these projects, such as the Roe Valley Hydro Electric Scheme and the EU 3rd Directive for driver licensing, the capital funding will continue into 2012-13 in line with the project timescales.

The Department will also provide £1.6 million funding in 2011-12 via the Rethink Waste Fund, with residual funding of £0.4 million in 2012-13 in relation to the new civic amenity site in Ballymena. In 2011-12 the Department plans to disburse £1.4 million from the Strategic Waste Infrastructure Fund (SWIF) to the three waste management groups to support them in achieving the key milestones necessary to bring their waste infrastructure procurements to financial close.

Table 2 below provides details of the various Rethink Waste projects and the split of the SWIF funding over the three waste management groups.

Table 1: Departmental Capital Projects (£000s)		
	Proposed Costs	**Projected Timescale**
Restoration of Thompson Dock Gate, Titanic Quarter	1,500	October 2011 to March 2012
Roe Valley Hydro Electric Scheme (£0.6m in 2011-12 and £0.5m in 2012-13)	1,100	September 2007 to September 2012
Dunluce Castle Village Field – Land Purchase	205	January 2011 to December 2011
EU 3RD Directive Implementation in respect of driver licensing	2,010	April 2011 to January 2013
Boiler replacement at Lisburn Test Centre	440	June 2011 to October 2011
Boiler replacement at Downpatrick Test Centre	420	June 2011 to October 2011
Planning Portal System	500	October 2011 to March 2012
Total Departmental projects	**6,175**	

Table 2: Rethink Waste and Strategic Waste Infrastructure Projects (£000s)	
Rethink Waste Fund Projects	**Proposed Costs**
Antrim Borough Council – Reuse and refurbishment of householder items.	15
Antrim Borough Council – Rollpacker/compactor	89
Banbridge District Council – new signage at all bring bank sites	10
Ballymena Borough Council - new civic amenity site	680
Ballymena and Newtownabbey Borough Councils – expanded recycling collection service	270
Coleraine Borough Council - 2 mobile recycling units	19
Cookstown District Council – purchase of a wheeled excavator and additional containers.	152
Down District Council - new civic amenity site.	200
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough – increasing capacity for green waste.	154
Newry and Mourne District Council – Civils containers and signage.	70
Newry and Mourne District Council – Sealed green waste compactors/containers	74
North Down Borough Council – 2 mobile recycling units	17
Omagh District Council – 3 rollpackers	225
Total Rethink Waste Fund	1,974

Table 2: Rethink Waste and Strategic Waste Infrastructure Projects (£000s)	
Rethink Waste Fund Projects	**Proposed Costs**
Strategic Waste Infrastructure Projects	
NWRWMG	600
SWaMP	550
Arc21	250
Total Strategic Waste Infrastructure Fund	**1,400**

Article 28 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many access agreements have been entered into by each District Council pursuant to Article 28 of the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983; and what is the total area of access land created as a result.

(AQW 2760/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Article 28 applies to councils and they do not have any requirement to report to the Department on delivery. This question has however been referred to the councils, all of whom have replied. It has not been possible to verify that each council has interpreted the question in the same way nor to confirm the accuracy of the figures supplied.

Under Article 28 of the Access Order, two councils report that they have entered into 73 Access Agreements for Open Country, with a total area of 2.3ha. It seems likely that there is an error in the figure for Magherafelt. A breakdown of the responses by council follows.

Council	Number Open Country Access Agreements -Article 28	Area (Hectares)
Derry	1	2.1
Magherafelt	72	0.2
Total	**73**	**2.3**

Article 29 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many access agreements have been entered into by each District Council pursuant to Article 29 of the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983; and what is the total area of access land created as a result.

(AQW 2761/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Article 29 applies to councils and they do not have any requirement to report to the Department on delivery. This question has however been referred to the councils, all of whom have replied. It has not been possible to verify that each council has interpreted the question in the same way nor to confirm the accuracy of the figures supplied.

Under Article 29 of the Access Order one council, Castlereagh Borough Council, reported that it has entered into nine Access Orders for Open Country, with a total area of 0.64ha.

Article 10 of the Recreation and Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many permissive path agreements have been entered into by each District Council pursuant to Article 10 of the Recreation and Youth Service

(NI) Order 1986; and to detail the number and total length of permissive paths for which a current permissive path agreement exists.

(AQW 2762/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The lead department for the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986 is the Department of Education. Article 10 applies to councils and they do not have any requirement to report to the Department of the Environment on delivery. This question has however been referred to the councils, all of whom have replied. It has not been possible to verify that each council has interpreted the question in the same way nor to confirm the accuracy of the figures supplied.

Under article 10 of the Recreation and Youth Service Order, eight councils report that they have entered into 83 Permissive Path Agreements, with a total length of 82.4km. A breakdown of the responses by council follows.

Council	Number Permissive path arrangements - Article 10 of Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order	Length (km)
Ballymena	6	17.80
Banbridge	5	9.79
Coleraine	2	6.00
Fermanagh	19	16.38
Larne	7	12.87
Limavady	10	5.50
Moyle	31	11.26
Newry and Mourne	3	2.80
Total	**83**	**82.40**

Article 3 of the Occupiers' Liability (Northern Ireland) Order 1987

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many successful actions under Article 3 of the Occupiers' Liability (NI) Order 1987 have been brought in each District Council area in respect of land on which a public right of way, public path or permissive path exists or which is designated access land.

(AQW 2763/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Occupiers' Liability (NI) Order 1987 is not the specific responsibility of the Department of the Environment and councils do not have any requirement to report to the Department on actions taken under this order. This question has however been referred to the councils, all of whom have replied. Two councils have reported that 12 successful actions have been taken under Article 3 of the Order, a breakdown of responses follow. It has not been possible to verify that these relate specifically to land on which a public right of way, public path or permissive path exists or which is designated access land. Nor does it account for claims under Article 3 on other land which the council may not be aware of or have control over. A breakdown of the responses by council follows.

Council	Antrim	Down	Totals
Number reported successful actions under Article 3 Occupiers' Liability in council area.	11	1	12

In the case of the Department of the Environment six claims were received between 2008 and 2010 relating to injuries sustained by visitors to NIEA properties, two of which were pursued. However these did not relate specifically to informal outdoor recreation.

A study to examine the actual court cases and out of court settlements in relation to Occupiers' Liability and informal outdoor recreation was commissioned by Sport Northern Ireland in 2011 and provides further detail on these cases and those on other publicly accessible land.

Single Wind Turbines and Wind Farms: Applications

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of applications for (i) single wind turbines; and (ii) wind farms which were approved in (a) 2010; and (b) 2011 to date.

(AQW 2801/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) During the period 2010 – 2011, 121 applications for single wind turbines were approved. The Department is unable at this stage to separate out the figures for 2010 and 2011 due to constraints imposed by the existing computer system. Time constraints have prevented a manual count of the numbers of approvals over the two time periods.

(ii) (a) In 2010, 10 wind farm applications were approved.
(b) In 2011 to date, 5 wind farm applications have been approved.

Election Posters

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take once the political parties have responded to his Department's proposed changes to the legislation on the display of election posters.

(AQW 2819/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On receiving the parties' responses I will carefully consider all their views before deciding the way forward. However, I would anticipate further progress by mid November.

Pollution Inspections

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many pollution inspections have been carried out in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2847/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for investigating reports of pollution affecting ground or surface waters and for instigating enforcement action, where necessary, under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

Table A below indicates the number of water pollution inspections carried out by NIEA under the Water (NI) Order 1999 in each of the last 5 years.

TABLE A

Year	Water Pollution Inspections
2011 – 2012 (YTD)	1023
2010 - 2011	2080
2009 – 2010	2152
2008 – 2009	2244
2007 – 2008	2291

Year	Water Pollution Inspections
2006 - 2007	2081

NIEA is also responsible for regulating Part A and B activities prescribed for control under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (NI) 2003 ('the PPC Regulations').

Table B below summarises the number of inspections carried out by the Agency under the PPC Regulations in each of the last 5 years.

TABLE B

Year	PPC Pollution Inspections
2011 – 2012 (YTD)	628
2010 - 2011	1428
2009 – 2010	1334*
2008 – 2009	858
2007 – 2008	870
2006 - 2007	841

* Start of data recording in Land and Resource Management.

Rowan Tree Centre, Pomeroy: Units

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether any businesses are currently using the units in the Rowan Tree Centre, Pomeroy, as office space, in contravention of the planning permission granted for the Centre which prohibits the units from being used for office space.

(AQW 2920/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department is currently investigating the exact nature of all uses within the Rowan Tree Centre, Pomeroy, to establish if there is any breach of planning approvals I/2005/0359/O and I/2007/0435/RM which conditioned that the uses on site be restricted to Light Industrial Use, Business Use and/or Storage or Distribution Use as indicated in Class B1 (b & c), Class B2 and Class B4 of the Planning (Use Classes) Order (NI) 2004.

There is also a planning application under consideration for change of use of rooms.

Road Safety Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 2106/11-15, to detail how the grant allocations were divided between the 26 local councils.

(AQW 2934/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The 2010/11 contract to deliver funding to the voluntary and community sector in respect of road safety projects was managed by UnLtd. The funding was distributed direct to projects by UnLtd during 2010/11 on project merit basis. A total of 17 road safety projects throughout the province in both urban and rural areas were supported.

No funding was allocated to local councils.

Seal Population

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to protect the seal population.

(AQW 2946/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The two species of seal found in Northern Irish waters are the harbour (common) and the grey seal. Both species are fully protected under local and European legislation.

Seals are included on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 as 'animals that are protected at all times.' They are also listed on Schedule 6 as animals 'which may not be killed or taken by certain methods' and on Schedule 7 as 'animals which may not be sold alive or dead at any time'.

Additionally, both species are listed under Annex 2 of the EC Habitats Directive as species whose conservation requires the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).

The Department has designated two SACs where harbour seals are qualifying features – Strangford Lough SAC and Murlough SAC. In these areas NIEA undertakes monthly counts of the seal population to ensure that it remains within favourable conservation status. Monthly counts are also undertaken at various other locations around the shores of Northern Ireland to monitor the wider seal population.

As a result of previous concerns expressed about seal protection in Northern Ireland, the Department has recently introduced additional legislative protection for seals under the terms of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. As such, it is now an offence for any person to either intentionally or recklessly disturb common or grey seals in Northern Irish waters.

Any offences under the terms of the Wildlife Order are classed as wildlife crime and are investigated by the PSNI. NIEA can provide scientific expertise to assist in these cases.

Election Posters

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment when he expects to make an announcement on the next stage of the consultation on the possible ban on the use of election posters in public spaces.

(AQW 2982/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On receiving the parties' responses I will carefully consider all their views before deciding the way forward. However, I would anticipate further progress by mid November.

Townland Addresses

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment whether a feasibility study was carried out on the possibility of Fermanagh District Council introducing the Pointer System in conjunction with the use of townland addresses so that those living in Co Fermanagh could continue to use their townland as their principal address.

(AQW 2984/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I would refer the member to DFP where responsibility for the matter resides. I understand however, no study was undertaken.

Discharge Consents

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many discharge consents were granted by his Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2991/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, the consent of the Department of the Environment is required to discharge trade or sewage effluent to a waterway or water contained in underground strata.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) administers a system of discharge consents which specify conditions relating to the quality and quantity of effluent that may be discharged. The conditions are formulated to ensure that the discharge can be sustained by the receiving waterway without damage to the aquatic environment and without breaching national or EU Directive standards.

The types of consent can be split into three broad categories:

- Industrial/Private Sewage
- Domestic septic tanks
- Discharges from Northern Ireland Water installations

The table below details the number of each type of consent issued by NIEA in each of the last five years.

Year	Consent Type			
	Industrial/Private Sewage	**Domestic**	**Northern Ireland Water**	**Total**
2006	522	4571	n/a*	**5093**
2007	504	3644	1432	**5580**
2008	409	3069	51	**3529**
2009	320	2339	136	**2795**
2010	326	2471	118	**2915**

* Water Service became Northern Ireland Water on 1 April 2007 and was for the first time required to have consents issued under the Water Order in respect of all its discharges. Prior to this time discharges were controlled through registered discharge standards.

Single Use Carrier Bags

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the proposed levy on single use carrier bags; and whether there have been any changes or alterations to what was originally proposed.

(AQW 3023/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My objective is that charging for single use carrier bags should commence from April 2013. Achievement of this target depends, of course, on the required subordinate legislation and the necessary operational arrangements being in place in advance of that date.

The public consultation on proposals for the levy closed on 12 October 2011; the outcome will help determine my approach to implementation. I will of course keep the Executive informed of key policy developments; the Department will publish a synopsis of responses received, in due course.

I am considering whether, in the longer term, the charge should be extended to cover certain types of reusable bags. This would be similar to the approach in the Republic of Ireland, where the levy applies to reusable plastic bags which are sold for less than 70 cents. This issue was addressed in the policy consultation; any such extension of the Northern Ireland levy would require further primary legislation.

Environmental Impact of Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Northern Ireland Environment Agency is prepared to work with the Environmental Protection Agency in the Republic of Ireland on the study to investigate the environmental impact of hydraulic fracturing.

(AQW 3301/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has been in contact with the Republic of Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding the hydraulic fracturing proposals in counties Leitrim and Cavan.

The EPA informed NIEA that they are commissioning a desk study to investigate the environmental considerations and impacts of shale gas exploration and extraction, in particular with regard to the use of hydraulic fracturing technology. The study will also involve an investigation into the regulatory approaches of other countries, with a view to helping to establish Best Environmental Practice.

NIEA will consider the outputs of the desk study when made available by EPA and will then explore the opportunities for cooperating on further more substantial studies in future.

Initial discussions with colleagues in RoI have taken place to see if a common approach is helpful.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Chairperson or Chief Executive: Arm's-length Bodies

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the daily rate paid by his Department to each Chairperson or Chief Executive of each of its arm's-length bodies; and how this rate was determined and approved.

(AQW 2743/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Chairpersons of DFP's arm's length bodies are paid in line with the central guidance – Remuneration of Chairmen and Members of Public Bodies and other Fee Rates – Annual Daily Rates – 2010 & 2011. This ranges from £136 to £470.

Invoices for Construction Work

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what proportion of invoices for construction work have been paid on time, broken down by each Department, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2922/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The answer below relates to DFP. Please refer directly to other Departments for information relating to their invoices.

It is not possible to separate construction-related prompt payment performance entirely from non-construction orders. However as all DFP construction work is processed through a single Work Order Processing System (WOPS), the figures given below should be representative of the performance for construction-related invoices as these make up 80% of the payments processed through the system.

Year	FY09/10	FY10/11	FY11/12 to date
Proportion of WOPS invoices paid on time	88%	96%	86%

Directive 200/35/EC

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the date when departmental guidance was issued following the final transposition of Directive 200/35/EC; and (ii) to whom the guidance was issued.

(AQW 3073/11-15)

Mr Wilson: DFP issued guidance on the 'Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002' under DAO (DFP) 19/02 on 23 August 2002. Further guidance was also issued on 'Prompt Payment

of Invoices' under DAO (DFP) 12/08 on 27 November 2008. In addition, guidance is also included in Annex 4.6 of Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI), which issued in June 2008.

DAOs (Dear Accounting Officer letters) are issued to the Accounting Officers in each department, but are applicable and should be forwarded to their Agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs). MPMNI applies to all public bodies in Northern Ireland.

Corporation Tax

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether a lower rate of Corporation Tax would increase inequality; and what measures he intends to put in place to ensure that it does not.

(AQW 3118/11-15)

Mr Wilson: While no one can be precise about the scale of the benefits the devolution of Corporation Tax powers might bring, I am in no doubt that reducing the tax rate would help us in attracting new inward investment and help local companies to invest and grow throughout the region. The Executive's objective, should we pursue this, will be seeking to increase growth across Northern Ireland which would be to the benefit of all our people.

Any reduction in the rate of Corporation Tax would apply across the whole of Northern Ireland. Therefore, while an equality impact assessment has not been carried out at this time, I do not expect that a lowering of the rate would impact differently on any Section 75 group.

Corporation Tax

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an estimate of the administration cost of devolving Corporation Tax powers.

(AQW 3119/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I would refer the Member to the reply I provided to Mr Roy Beggs in AQO 511/11-15 issued on 10 October 2011.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any emerging financial pressures that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3143/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My department did not identify any additional requirements for current expenditure or capital investment as part of the October Monitoring Round.

Vacant Domestic Properties

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacant domestic properties, based on rating records, in the (i) Ballymena Borough Council; (ii) Ballymoney Borough Council; and (iii) Moyle District Council areas,

(AQW 3160/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The latest figures available, at 9th October 2011, indicate that there are (i) 1,189, (ii) 646 and (iii) 654 vacant domestic properties in the District Council Areas of Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle respectively.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given that Air Passenger Duty is an excepted matter, when he expects primary legislation to be introduced to make its devolution possible; and whether he expects the powers devolved to extend to domestic flights within the UK.

(AQW 3229/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The scope, including the question of Air Passenger Duty (APD) powers for domestic flights, and precise arrangements for the devolution of these powers has not yet been agreed and discussions with Treasury are ongoing in this regard.

The precise legislative changes that are needed will depend on which aspects of APD will be devolved and therefore I cannot be definitive on the legislative timetable for this at this stage.

Jobs

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many jobs have been (i) created; and (ii) lost in each year since 1998.

(AQW 3243/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide an exact measure of the number of jobs that have been (i) created; and (ii) lost in each year from 1998. However, figures from the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) can be used to estimate the net change in employee job levels during this period.

Table 1 overleaf presents the total number of employee jobs and the net change each year between June 1998 and June 2011.

TABLE 1 NI EMPLOYEE JOBS BETWEEN 1998 AND 2011 (SEASONALLY ADJUSTED)

Period	Total Employee Jobs	Annual Net Change
1998	613,250	15,490
1999	625,700	12,450
2000	641,960	16,260
2001	651,530	9,570
2002	665,100	13,580
2003	674,140	9,040
2004	681,430	7,290
2005	695,890	14,460
2006	706,850	10,950
2007	720,820	13,970
2008	733,160	12,340
2009	710,610	-22,550
2010	709,540	-1,070
2011	699,650	-9,890

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 and refer to June each year.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many times in the last three years each Department has requested the assistance of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit.

(AQW 3338/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of times each Northern Ireland (NI) Department has requested the assistance of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) is set out in the table below. It should be noted that most of the work of PEDU has been commissioned by the Executive, reflecting the requirements of all Departmental Ministers.

This includes the monitoring of the delivery of the Executive's Programme for Government, as well as the provision of advice and support for the 8 Accountability meetings that have been taken place with Departments when the monitoring reports have shown less than expected levels of progress.

Furthermore, at the request of the Executive, PEDU is currently working on two major projects in respect of the scope to make savings in the Education and Health & Social Care sectors, which collectively account for over 60% of current expenditure by NI Departments.

TABLE: REQUEST FOR PEDU SUPPORT FROM NI DEPARTMENTS 2008-2011

Department	Number of Requests
NI Executive	3
Agriculture and Rural Development	1
Culture, Arts and Leisure	0
Education	1
Employment & Learning	0
Enterprise, Trade & Investment	0
Finance and Personnel	5
Health, Social Services and Public Safety	0
Environment	1
Justice	0
Regional Development	0
Social Development	1
Office of First Minister & Deputy First Minister	2

Centre of Procurement Expertise

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the public bodies assessed for the Centre of Procurement Expertise status in (a) 2009/10; and (b) 2010/11; and (ii) the outcome of each assessment .

(AQW 3407/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy requires the competency of Centres of Procurement Expertise to be reviewed on a periodic basis. The last review was carried out in 2009 and the public bodies that were assessed were: Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Translink, NI Water, Health Estates, Procurement and Logistics Service, Roads Service and Central Procurement Directorate. All the bodies retained CoPE status. The full report can be found on the CPD website

at: http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/procurement-2/cpd/cpd_publications/cpd_review_of_centres_of_procurement_expertise.htm

Consultancy Firms

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are in place to prevent any conflict of interest in the awarding of contracts by his Department, and their arm's-length bodies, to consultancy firms.

(AQW 3408/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) works closely with public bodies in the appointment process for consultants. The issue of conflicts of interest is taken very seriously and there are a number of safeguards built into the current procurement process.

Tenderers are required to highlight any potential conflicts of interest in tender documentation and where they exist, describe how they will be managed.

All selection and evaluation panel members are required to sign a Conflict of Interest declaration. The Chair of the selection/evaluation panel is responsible for ensuring this is done and that action is taken as appropriate in order to ensure there is no distortion of competition.

CPD guidance reminds panel members of the Seven Principles of Public Life and the NICS Code of Ethics.

Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cost to his Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3411/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As work to fulfil the commitments detailed in our Equality Scheme has been mainstreamed within my department, information on the cost cannot readily be disaggregated.

Special EU Programmes Body

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the review of staffing within the Special EU Programmes Body, for his assessment of whether there are sufficient staff to process applications in a timely manner.

(AQW 3492/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A staffing review of the SEUPB in 2010 recommended that SEUPB's staffing complement remain at the present 65 until 2012 when a further review should be undertaken. This recommendation was based on the number of staff required in order to deliver the current EU programmes. This recommendation was implemented. I am therefore content that SEUPB have the sufficient staff complement to process applications in a timely manner.

County Fermanagh: Public Sector Jobs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the rationale in continuing to take public sector jobs out of Co.Fermanagh and relocating elsewhere.

(AQW 3516/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is currently no centralised programme for the location or relocation of public sector or civil service jobs. Individual public bodies, departments and Ministers can of course consider the relocation of public sector facilities and jobs subject to the normal requirements of business need, value for money and affordability.

County Fermanagh: Public Sector Jobs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans the Executive has to (i) stop the flow of public sector jobs out of Co.Fermanagh; and (ii) decentralise public sector jobs in the future.

(AQW 3517/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is currently no centralised programme for the location or relocation of public sector or civil service jobs. Individual public bodies, departments and Ministers can of course consider the relocation of public sector facilities and jobs subject to the normal requirements of business need, value for money and affordability.

Cost of Answering Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average cost to his Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3551/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

Civil Service Staff

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many staff are currently employed by the Civil Service.

(AQW 3572/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The most recently published statistics are contained in the 'Equality Statistics for the NICS' publication, based on staff in post at 1 January 2011. This shows the number of permanent NICS staff (headcount) at 1 January 2011 was 27,701*. The full report can be obtained from the link below:

http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/NICS%20Equality%20Report%202011.pdf

* Notes:

Includes staff on Career Break and Secondment

Includes Industrial and Non-Industrial staff

Excludes approximately 1800 uniformed Prison Service personnel.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give examples of how the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit has succeeded in encouraging greater cross-departmental co-operation and more effective use of public spending.

(AQO 647/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Although it is important to further develop and enhance cross-departmental co-operation, this is not an explicit objective of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit.

The primary focus of the Unit's work in recent years has been in respect of delivery. This has included projects examining the performance of the Planning Service as well as Land & Property Services within my own Department.

PEDU is currently working on two major projects, with the respective Departments, to identify the scope to make more effective use of available resources in the Education and Health & Social Care sectors.

These projects involve an examination of best practice across Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK as well as the extent to which the findings from previous studies have been taken forward.

Banks: Dormant Accounts

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on dormant bank accounts.

(AQO 653/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Reclaim Fund announced on 2nd August 2011 that the first tranche to be transferred to the Big Lottery Fund will be £30million of which Northern Ireland will receive a Barnett share.

It is expected that distributions from the Reclaim Fund in the first year will be between £60-100 million of which Northern Ireland will receive a Barnett share. I have no further information at this stage on the scale or timing of future releases as these will depend on the rate of reclaim.

Once, I have clarity as to the overall amounts likely to be available to

Northern Ireland I will bring forward my proposals as to our spending priorities.

Banks: Lending

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, following his recent discussions with the banking institutions, whether there are now clear targets in place for lending in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 655/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Government's Project Merlin initiative has set lending targets for the UK as a whole but there are no separate targets within this for Northern Ireland, or for any other UK region.

I have been pressing the Treasury for such regional lending targets or, at minimum, a requirement on the banks that they would have to demonstrate lending throughout the UK in meeting these targets. We have been advised that the Project Merlin agreement cannot be reopened. I have also raised this issue with the Minister of Finance in relation to the Irish owned banks but again have been advised that the current lending targets for Irish banks do not include a separate element for Northern Ireland.

At my recent meetings with local banks they have assured me that, while overall lending has fallen, this partly reflects poor demand, that they do have money available to lend to viable projects, and that 9 out of 10 lending applications are approved.

I will continue to liaise with the BBA on the progress of the local banks have made in implementing an independent review mechanism for those who are refused bank lending that was promised in the Business Finance Taskforce recommendations. I hope that this will be in place soon.

Civil Service: Equal Pay

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he is aware of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, or any of the Civil Service trade unions, failing to advise retiring staff that they had a right to lodge a claim for equal pay within six months of leaving the service.

(AQO 656/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Civil Service does not give such advice. There is no onus on an employer to advise staff of their rights under equal pay legislation when leaving employment.

Responsibilities of the Civil Service trade unions is a matter for those organisations.

Public Sector Contracts

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to streamline the application process to assist small and medium sized enterprises and social enterprises in tendering for public sector contracts.

(AQO 658/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My officials are working hard to streamline procurement processes to help small businesses (SMEs) and social economies (SEEs) tender for public sector contracts.

Let me highlight some progress made to date:

- The eSourcingNI procurement portal provides easy access to all competitions over £30k being run by CPD and Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPE). Suppliers have only to register their details on this system once thus saving time when tendering for contracts.
- A standard construction works Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) has been developed by CPD and CoPEs in conjunction with the industry. This incorporates proportionate minimum standards for issues such as experience and financial standing. Similar measures are being developed with the supplies and services sector.
- Updated guidance has been issued to help SMEs and SEEs understand the procurement processes better.

In addition to these measures CPD and CoPEs have regular engagement with suppliers at a range of supplier awareness and Meet the Buyer events. These events provide suppliers with practical advice on tendering for government contracts.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit: Department of Education

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the work that the Performance Efficiency Delivery Unit has carried out in the Department of Education.

(AQO 659/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In November 2010, the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) commenced work on a Review of the Education Sector in collaboration with the Department of Education (DE). The Terms of Reference provided for the Review to be taken forward in two stages. The Stage One report, which was published by the Education Minister in March 2011, identified a range of broad areas within the education sector where there appeared to be scope to make savings.

At Stage Two the Review team examined the areas of Home to School Transport and School Catering in greater detail with a view to making recommendations on how savings could be achieved. Work on Stage

Two is nearing completion and I expect to receive reports setting out the findings on each area in the coming weeks.

Government Contracts: Payments to Subcontractors

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has received any representations from sub-contractors working on Government contracts who are not being paid promptly by the main contractor.

(AQO 660/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have not received any direct representations from subcontractors working on Government contracts who are not being paid promptly by the main contractor. However, I recently responded to a letter from such a subcontractor, which had been passed to me from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in which the subcontractor stated that he did not receive final payments of monies from the main contractor on completion of the contract.

I am also aware that while main contractors on public contracts are paid promptly, some have been slow to pay subcontractors and suppliers in their supply chain. This is disappointing and a matter of major concern. My officials have been working with the construction industry to

implement measures which would help to address the problem. I have also now instructed my officials in the Central Procurement Directorate to consider what further steps can be taken to improve matters.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Intermediate Care

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the occupational cost to his Department of providing public sector intermediate care in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last three years; and (ii) how this compares to the cost of providing intermediate care in the private sector.

(AQW 3098/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Intermediate care relates to a wide range of services and is provided in two ways:

- Rehabilitation and reablement services provided to the patient in their own home through community rehabilitation staff and other visiting professionals where required; and
- Community bed based schemes where the patient stays for a period, generally no more than a few weeks.

Given the wide range of services it is therefore not possible to detail the occupational cost of providing public sector intermediate care in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area. A comparison of the cost of providing intermediate care in the private sector is also not possible.

Occupational Therapists

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many occupational therapists are employed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust for community visits and assessments; (ii) what is the waiting time for an assessment by an occupational therapist in the community after referral; and (iii) whether a GP can speed up the process.

(AQW 3162/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Western HSC Trust advised that there are 25 (23.69 Whole-Time Equivalent) Occupational Therapists employed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust specifically to carry out community visits and assessments as at October 2011. In addition to these Community Occupational Therapists, a further 31 (25.90 Whole-Time Equivalent) Occupational Therapists working within other departments within the Western HSC Trust are also responsible for community visits within their specialist area if the client's home is the preferred setting for assessment and intervention.

Waiting times figures are only available from referral to commencement of treatment by an occupational therapist. The latest waiting times for the Western Health and Social Care Trust, are detailed in the table below for information.

	Waiting time from referral to treatment for Occupational Therapy (by weeks waiting)[1]					
HSC Trust	**0-3**	**>3 to 6**	**>6 to 9**	**> 9 to 13**	**> 13**	**Total**
Western	305	279	232	227	327	**1,370**

1 Figures detailed were provided on request by the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Board, and have not been validated by the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety. Information relates to 7 October 2011.

The Community Occupational Therapy service has open access system for referrals from multiple sources. In many cases after receiving a referral, the Occupational Therapy service will determine whether up to date medical information is required to assist with the prioritisation of a referral and to advise treatment planning. They will consider this medical information alongside other indicators of need and risk such as the extent of functional difficulties, level of social support and existing facilities available in the home to determine priority for assessment. This medical information may also indicate

whether medical or surgical interventions are planned which may address the underlying cause of disability, e.g. hip joint replacement, cardiac surgery which may in turn mean that adaptations may not be required to address longer term needs.

Early medical information indicating diagnosis, prognosis, presenting functional difficulties and planned medical or surgical interventions speeds up the process of screening and prioritising Community Occupational Therapy referrals.

Care Homes: Accidents

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many accidents in care homes have been reported by residents, or relatives of residents, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3166/11-15)

Mr Poots: Care homes registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority have an obligation to report accidents to the Authority. Not to do so would be a breach of regulations. However information in the form requested is not available, as these reports are made by the registered person or registered manager on behalf of the service provider.

Care Homes: Misconduct by Staff

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how allegations of misconduct by care home staff have been reported by residents, or relatives of residents, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3167/11-15)

Mr Poots: Care homes registered with the Regulation and Improvement Authority have an obligation to report allegations of misconduct by care home staff to the Authority. Not to do so would be a breach of regulations. However, information in the form requested is not available, as these reports are made by the registered person or registered manager on behalf of the service provider.

Care Homes: Misconduct by Staff

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how allegations of misconduct by care home staff have been reported by care homes in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3168/11-15)

Mr Poots: Care homes registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority have an obligation to report allegations of misconduct by care home staff to the Authority. Not to do so would be a breach of regulations. During the period 1 April 2010 to 30 September 2011, 546 allegations of misconduct by care home staff were reported.

Information for the period prior to 1 April 2010 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Care Homes

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many events which adversely affected the care, health, welfare or safety of a resident in a care home have been reported by residents, or relatives of residents, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3169/11-15)

Mr Poots: Care homes registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority have an obligation to report to the Authority any event in the home which adversely affects the care, health, welfare or safety of a resident. Not to do so would be a breach of regulations. However, information in the form requested is not readily available, as these reports are made by the registered person or registered manager on behalf of the service provider.

Care Homes

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many events which adversely affect the care, health, welfare or safety of a resident in a care home have been reported by care homes in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3170/11-15)

Mr Poots: Care homes registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) have an obligation to report all "notifiable events" to the Authority. These include events that have the potential to adversely affect the care, health, welfare or safety of a resident. During the period 1 April 2010 to 30 September 2011 reports were received of 12,383 notifiable events. Because this total includes allegations that require further investigation, it is not possible to say definitively that all of these events adversely affected residents.

A database of notifiable events was introduced by the RQIA in 2010. Prior to that date the information is held on individual care home files and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry: Accident and Emergency Unit

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can confirm a date for the opening of the extension at the Accident and Emergency Unit in the Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry.

(AQW 3176/11-15)

Mr Poots: The new extension to the Accident and Emergency Unit at Daisy Hill Hospital has been operational for the past 4 weeks. This area is being used to see minor injuries only whilst awaiting delivery of patient monitors, which are essential for the safe care of more seriously ill patients. Delivery of and commissioning and training on these new monitors will be completed by 31st October.

This will then allow the new extension to be utilised for the care of seriously ill patients from 1st November.

Care Homes: Serious Injury to a Resident

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many incidents resulting in serious injury to a resident in a care home have been reported by residents, or relatives of residents, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3187/11-15)

Mr Poots: Care homes registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority have an obligation to report any incidents resulting in serious injury to a resident in a care home to the Authority. Not to do so would be a breach of regulations. However information in the form requested is not available, as these reports are made by the registered person or registered manager on behalf of the service provider.

Care Homes

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any of the bi-annual inspections of care homes carried out by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority in each of the last five years have raised concerns about the policy and procedures adopted in relation to the care of vulnerable residents; and if so, what actions were taken by the Authority.

(AQW 3193/11-15)

Mr Poots: Where RQIA inspectors identify a concern in relation to any aspect of the care of residents during bi-annual inspections, they will raise their concerns with the provider at the time of the inspection. In addition, where required, the inspector will also make time-bound recommendations based on minimum standards or make requirements to ensure full compliance with the relevant legislation. During the period 1 April 2010 to 30 September 2011, the RQIA made approximately

7000 legislative requirements and approximately 7,300 recommendations to care homes arising from inspections. Information prior to these dates is not held in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Following an inspection, a home must respond to each legislative requirement and recommendation with a quality improvement plan detailing the action the provider will take to address the necessary improvements and the associated timescale. In subsequent inspections the RQIA's inspectors will check the progress made and, where necessary, take further enforcement action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents.

Care Homes

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any of the bi-annual inspections of care homes carried out by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority in each of the last five years have raised concerns about the care of vulnerable residents; and if so, what actions were taken by the Authority.

(AQW 3194/11-15)

Mr Poots: Where RQIA inspectors identify a concern in relation to any aspect of the care of residents during bi-annual inspections, they will raise their concerns with the provider at the time of the inspection. In addition, where required, the inspector will also make time-bound recommendations based on minimum standards or make requirements to ensure full compliance with the relevant legislation. During the period 1 April 2010 to 30 September 2011, the RQIA made approximately 7000 legislative requirements and approximately 7,300 recommendations to care homes arising from inspections. Information prior to these dates is not held in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Following an inspection, a home must respond to each legislative requirement and recommendation with a quality improvement plan detailing the action the provider will take to address the necessary improvements and the associated timescale. In subsequent inspections the RQIA's inspectors will check the progress made and, where necessary, take further enforcement action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents.

Care Homes: Accidents

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many accidents in care homes have been reported by those responsible for the care homes in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3195/11-15)

Mr Poots: Care homes registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) have an obligation to report accidents to the Authority. Not to do so would be a breach of regulations. During the period 1 April 2010 to 30 September 2011, a total of 2,401 accidents in care homes were reported to RQIA by nursing home and residential care home providers. However, information for the period prior to 1 April 2010 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost

Care Homes

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many incidents resulting in serious injury to a resident have been reported by care homes in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3196/11-15)

Mr Poots: Care homes registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority have an obligation to report incidents resulting in serious injury to a resident to the Authority. Not to do so would be a breach of regulations. During the period 1 April 2010 to 30 September 2011, a total of 1,785 incidents resulting in serious injury to a resident were reported. However, information for the period prior to 1 April 2010 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Buses

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how many buses are not currently being used by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) why the buses are not being used; (iii) where the buses are parked; and (iv) the cost of parking to date.

(AQW 3215/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can advise that six of the Belfast HSC Trust's 76 coaches and ten minibuses are currently not in use because they are over eight years old and have been replaced with newer vehicles. These six vehicles, which are due to be auctioned in accordance with proper procedures, are parked in Transport Services depots at Belfast City Hospital and Knockbracken Healthcare Park. No charge is incurred for parking the vehicles.

Supplier Invoices

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the statutory remedy available to the suppliers to those Health and Social Care Trusts that have paid invoices late; (ii) whether the Health and Social Care Trusts are aware of the remedy available to the suppliers; and (iii) whether he can offer an assurance that all claims from suppliers will be settled promptly.

(AQW 3226/11-15)

Mr Poots: The statutory remedy available to suppliers where invoices have been paid late by HSC Trusts is the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998.

This statutory remedy has been communicated to all HSC Trusts (and all other arm's length bodies) by Departmental guidance, specifically Finance Circulars and the manual of accounts.

HSC Trusts are advised to deal promptly with Late Payment Claims from suppliers, balanced by the need to verify the legitimacy and accuracy of such claims.

Supplier Invoices

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2224/11-15, how many supplier invoices were paid by his Department between 1 April 2011 and 31 August 2011; and of these, how many were paid late.

(AQW 3227/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department paid 2,997 invoices between 1 April 2011 and 31 August 2011 and 229 of these were paid late.

Huntingdon's Disease

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what treatment and care is available for people with Huntingdon's Disease; (ii) the number of care homes which provide care for people with the disease; and (iii) the number of people currently suffering from the disease.

(AQW 3235/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) People with Huntington's Disease have access to a wide range of services dependent on their individual assessed needs. Services range from domiciliary care, respite care, day care, direct payments, provision of aids and equipment as well as multidisciplinary support including Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Dietetics.

(ii) The information is not available.

(iii) Information on the number of people currently suffering from Huntington's Disease in NI is not available. However, In 2010/11 there were 60 admissions to HSC hospitals in Northern

Ireland where a diagnosis of Huntington's Disease was recorded. These admissions equate to approximately 36 individuals.

Protect Life Strategy

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to suicide prevention and the Protect Life Strategy (i) for his assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Strategy; (ii) for an update on his Department's review of the Strategy; and (iii) whether the Strategy will be subject to a public consultation, and when this is expected to take place.

(AQW 3239/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The review of Protect Life has indicated that its key strength has been the commitment and ownership of stakeholders in the community, voluntary and statutory sectors, and by families bereaved by suicide, in the implementation of the strategy. The main weakness has been the reliance on the achievement of the 15% reduction target as the primary gauge of the impact of the strategy since its publication in 2006. The NI Audit Office has acknowledged that the suicide rate alone is "an unreliable indicator of health patterns". Independent evaluation of Protect Life is being commissioned. This will provide a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of Protect Life.

(ii) The Protect Life Strategy is currently being refreshed in light of the findings of the Health Committee Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm, the findings from a review of international evidence and best practice, and feedback from a major workshop in September which had widespread community sector and Health and Social Care participation. The "refreshed strategy" is due for publication later this year.

(iii) I do not intend to make the "refreshed" strategy available for public consultation. The Protect Life Strategy was developed following very widespread public consultation and the "refresh" is being overseen by the cross-sectoral Suicide Strategy Implementation Body. The "refreshed" strategy will have a two-year lifespan. New suicide prevention policy will be developed for 2013 and that will be subject to public consultation. In the meantime, I intend to seek the endorsement of the Health Committee and Executive for the "refreshed" strategy.

Private Care Homes

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of the cost of a patient residing in a private care home.

(AQW 3240/11-15)

Mr Poots: The average weekly cost of Independent Residential Care and Independent Nursing Care by Programme of Care is shown in the table below. This information is for 2009/10 (latest available) and is shown by Programme of Care:

	2009/10 Average Cost per Occupied Patient Week				
	Family & Child Care £	**Elderly Care £**	**Mental Health £**	**Learning Disability £**	**Physical & Sensory Disability £**
Independent Residential Care	1,100	451	469	668	594
Independent Nursing Care	n/a	561	566	685	642

Private Care Homes

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current total annual cost to the Health Service of patients residing in private care homes.

(AQW 3241/11-15)

Mr Poots: The cost to the Health Service of patients residing in independent sector homes is set out in the table below. This information is for 2009/10 (latest available) and is shown by Programme of Care:

Programme of Care	Nursing Homes £m	Residential Homes £m	Total £m
Family & Child Care	-	1.3	1.3
Elderly Care	201.5	45.8	247.3
Mental Health	8.9	6.5	15.4
Learning Disability	26.6	27.3	53.9
Physical & Sensory Disability	12.0	2.0	14.0
Total	**249.0**	**82.9**	**331.9**

Source: Trust Financial Returns 2009/10

Private Care Homes

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether it is value for money to provide health care in private care homes rather than in Health Service care homes.

(AQW 3242/11-15)

Mr Poots: While direct comparison between homes is not straightforward, the information available would indicate that the cost of providing care in a private sector home would be less than the cost of care in a statutory sector home. However, value for money is about more than simply unit cost comparisons. It includes a host of other considerations like the quality of interaction that clients get from staff and whether their specific care needs are being met.

Ongoing DHSSPS policy for community care is to promote the development of a flourishing independent sector alongside good quality public services. Trusts have a duty to provide services that are good value for money, whether they are provided internally or externally, and both sectors should be capable of providing good value for money. Recent events surrounding Southern Cross Healthcare would serve to underline the value of that mixed economy of care.

PARIS System

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2025/11-15, whether the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, or any of his Department's bodies, have any ownership of the intellectual property of the PARIS system.

(AQW 3249/11-15)

Mr Poots: Neither the BHSCT, nor any other Departmental body, has any ownership or intellectual property of the PARIS system.

Community Information System

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2340/11-15, apart from the 11 staff which will implement the new Community Information System, (i) whether any additional staff will be required to achieve the objectives set out in the business case; (ii) to detail these objectives; and (iii) if any, how many of the staff will be recruited from outside the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 3251/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) In addition to the 11 administrative staff, it is anticipated that 12 service professionals or technical staff will be needed to contribute to the implementation of the system. However, achievement of the objectives will require day to day use of the system by a wide range of staff across the Trust.

(ii) An extract from the business case setting out the objectives is attached.

(iii) The BHSCT has tried to recruit as many staff as possible from within and only those posts that cannot be filled internally are being publicly advertised. This process is still on-going. To date 3 posts have been filled externally.

5 PROJECT AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND CONSTRAINTS

5.1 Project Aims

The major aim of the proposed investment in a CIS system for BHSCT is to support individual community professionals in their role of improving the quality of care and providing high quality, safe and effective services to patients/clients in the BHSCT area. This will be achieved through providing the necessary information to professionals in order to facilitate change. Improvements should be possible in the following areas: -

To improve the quality of care provided to people living in the community through the integration of information which supports the efficient sharing of relevant information between health and social care professionals;

To implement a modern and flexible IT system which supports community professionals in providing high quality person-centred services to patients and clients within modernising service delivery models and in accordance with relevant national and regional initiatives.

To support the Trust in the targeting, planning and monitoring of the services provided to patients/clients to ensure continuing and improving efficiency and effectiveness.

To support the implementation of multi-disciplinary teams responsible for the assessment, planning, delivery and co-ordination of care and treatment at individual patient/client level;

To ensure that the information necessary for agencies to work together to provide co-ordinated care in the community is available;

5.2 Project Objectives

The objectives of this project will be met by a combination of both the CIS system and staff who use the system. CIS is an enabler for the business change required to meet the objectives. Whilst the system itself can meet some of the objectives and deliver some of the benefits, it is the working practices of the staff, assisted and facilitated by the system, which will ultimately result in the objectives being achieved.

5.3. Summarised Project Objectives

A summary of the business needs identified in Section 4.5 is as follows:-

- Risk Management
- Expanding Business Information Requirements
- Modernising Community Services.
- Performance Management
- Efficiency and Productivity
- Structured and standardised information
- Integrated Assessment Processes.
- HPSS ICT Programme objectives

The Trust has developed the project objectives as follows, listed in order of priority:

Objective 1 – 1st Priority

To procure and implement within 3 ½ years of business case approval, a fully integrated BHSCT CIS system which spans the whole Trust and meets the business needs identified above and the requirements in the Output Based Specification (OBS).

This objective is ranked highest as the provision of a system which meets the requirements of the BHSCT and ensures that safe, effective and efficient patient/client care can be provided is of paramount importance.

Objective 2 – 2nd Priority

To implement a system within 3 ½ years of business case approval that will meet the strategic objectives of the BHSCT in relation to the provision of integrated and modernised health and social care services across the Belfast area. A key requirement of this is the ability of professional staff to share patient/client information. Therefore, a system is required so that information relating to patients/clients can be gathered, shared and collated at an individual, team, management and organisational level.

This objective is ranked 2nd, as a system is required which will help the newly formed BHSCT meet it's strategic objectives as outlined in 3.1.1. These can only be achieved if a fully integrated community system, which spans the whole Trust is in place.

The Trust aims to achieve the following targets within 3 ½ years of business case approval

a) Implementation of a fully integrated electronic health and social care record for use by all community services in BHSCT. There will be a reduction in the number of systems being used by Community staff from 6 systems to 2 (CIS and Child Health System which is a regional system and not part of this procurement).

b) All information for community services will come from one information source i.e. the CIS system.

Objective 3 – 3rd Priority

To implement a CIS System within 3½ years of business case approval that makes a greater contribution to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Trust in it's delivery of care. In particular, systems should enable the sharing of clinical information across disciplines, improve effectiveness in service planning, reduce the level of client index duplication and reduce the number of information systems used.

This objective is ranked 3rd, as improving effectiveness and efficiency is a key objective of the BHSCT.

The Trust aims to achieve the following targets within 3 ½ years of business case approval

a) Reduce the need to record patient and client demographic and GP details on more than one community IT system by providing a common patient/client index.

b) Reduce to 1% the number of duplicate records held across community systems by providing a single index and through use of the Health & Care Number. At present it is estimated that there are 7,000 duplicate records in NWB systems.

c) Reduce the number of information IT systems that professional and administrative staff have to use to record patient/client information within the BHSCT community sector from the current number of six to two.

d) Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the BHSCT in relation to service planning and performance management based on the ability to access accurate and timely information stored in a single Trust wide database. This will be accessible via flexible reporting tools, which will facilitate changing output requirements.

e) Provide a single download of community information to the DHPSS data warehouse, instead of the current 6 downloads from current systems, which are either manual or automatic.

Objective 4 – 4th Priority

To implement a system, which will support the Trust's need to streamline administrative processes in order to make the best use of available resources.

The Trust aims to achieve the following targets within 3 ½ years of business case approval. Baseline measures of these targets will be taken prior to implementation with each service group. Learning from the SEB implementation has shown that this is the most efficient way of obtaining baselines measures in such a large and complex organisation. There will be differential baseline measures per benefit between services so measuring these on an individual service basis is the most accurate way of assessing outcomes.

a) Reduce by 50% the number of times professional and administrative staff have to manually record demographic and GP details as part of the normal processes e.g. patient/client registration, referral, assessment, care planning, intervention, discharge and clinic management.

b) Reduce the time spent by professional and administrative staff searching for patient/client details such as family relationships, home circumstances, other professional involvement and clinical alerts by 50%.

c) Reduce the time spent by professional and administrative staff managing waiting lists and clinics by 20% by providing computerised waiting lists, clinic appointment diaries and automatic letter production.

d) Eliminate the need for dedicated data input staff by providing professional and administrative staff with an efficient method of capturing patient/client information through utilising modern data capture technologies. This will eliminate the need for the current 5.5 WTE data input staff.

Objective 5 - 5th Priority

To introduce a modern, easy to use information system which is flexible enough to meet the Trust's changing business requirements and be capable of modification with minimal overheads to respond to changes in clinical practice, organisational change and Trust/Departmental information requirements.

The Trust aims to achieve the following within 3 ½ years of business case approval

a) Staff surveys will be used to measure ease of use of the system and perceptions on flexibility of the system.

b) Standards for response times to requests for changes to the system will be set, which will be measured and monitored. The resources required to makes these changes will also be measured and monitored. If changes can be carried out by in-house staff this will reduce the cost of overheads. The setting of these standards will take place during contract negotiations.

Objective 6 – 6th Priority

To ensure that information on the system is held within the framework of security and confidentiality outlined in 'Protection and Use of Patient and Client Information – Guidance for the HPSS', and that the system is available to staff who require it subject to defined authorisation and access controls. The system must be configurable to control access to records and ensure that a full audit mechanism is in place to monitor access to records

This objective has a lower priority than the others as staff are already bound by codes of confidentiality through their employment contracts and professional bodies.

The Trust aims to achieve the following:-

a) Audit processes and procedures will be put in place upon implementation to monitor unauthorised access to the system using system logs.

b) Confirmation that access to the system is fully password protected and that the security settings are configurable as required prior to implementation.

c) The commission of an independent evaluation of the system's security and confidentiality configuration by the last quarter of year 1 of implementation to ensure that it complies with the HSC ICT Security policy.

Technology Partner Framework

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2339/11-15, to detail (i) the decision process used to decide that the Technology Partner Framework is an appropriate vehicle for the procurement of a system with an £8.9 million baseline budget; (ii) who made this decision; (iii) whether he intends to make funding available for all the Health and Social Care Trusts to procure this, or a similar, system; (iv) the estimated spend in capital and revenue if all Trusts avail of the Technology Partner Framework agreement to procure the system.

(AQW 3252/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The Technology Partner Framework is the main strategic ICT procurement vehicle supporting the whole of the HSC and would therefore be considered in any relevant procurement, regardless of value. It was assessed against all other viable options and was determined to be the best route for this project.

(ii) The decision was made by the CIS Project Board, supported by Procurement and Logistics Service within the BSO, a Centre of Procurement Excellence (COPE), and legal advisors.

(iii) If other Trusts take forward business cases for a similar system, then providing that they produce a sound business case, this would be considered for funding. Each business case would be considered in its own right against the available funding and other priorities at the time.

(iv) It is not possible to estimate this at present as the cost would depend on the number of users from each Trust (licence costs) and the services procured from the Technology Partner to implement such a system – each Trust is likely to have different requirements for external services.

PARIS System

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2339/11-15, (i) given that Civica is an existing supplier to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and was evaluated for this process, why in the interests of value for money, was the decision made to not evaluate any offers from other existing suppliers; and (ii) whether a production version of the PARIS System exists which meets the vast majority of the Trust's requirements or if further development work is required to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

(AQW 3253/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) HP, as the HSC's Technology Partner, procured through an EU advertised procurement, was asked to select the most appropriate solution to meet the Trust's output based requirements. The process did not involve the Trust evaluating offers from existing suppliers.

(ii) The PARIS application is a commercially available product which is currently in use in many GB healthcare Trusts. It is therefore a production system and is deemed to meet the requirements of the Belfast HSC Trust. Further development of the software is not required to meet current requirements.

Community Information System

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2339/11-15, when and how she will make (i) the document detailing the process followed in relation to the awarding of the contract; and (ii) the contractor solution document provided by Hewlett-Packard, available to the public.

(AQW 3254/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The process followed in awarding the contract was as defined in the HSC Technology Partner Agreement. A copy of the Technology Partner Agreement could be made available to the public on request, subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

(ii) A copy of the Contractor Solution Document could be made available to the public subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

PARIS System

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2339/11-15, (i) to provide an estimate of the percentage of revenue and capital budget required to modify the PARIS System to make it fit for purpose; (ii) why the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust appointed Civica as supplier of the System before checking if it could meet requirements; and (iii) what is the budget cap for this project.

(AQW 3255/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The PARIS software does not need to be modified to make it fit for purpose.

(ii) The Belfast HSC Trust carried out a detailed assessment of requirements as part of the exercise and these were supplied to the Technology partner in order for them to provide a solution – to be provided by Civica.

(iii) The budget cap is the approved amount in the Business Case. The Treasury Green Book rules require business cases to be resubmitted if at any time it appears likely that costs may exceed business case estimates by ten per cent.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any financial pressures that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3263/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have written to the Finance Minister and advised the Health Committee of the following financial pressures for my Department in the context of October Monitoring:

Residual demand pressures - £15m

This funding would support unfunded pressures such as elective care (including cardiac plastic and spinal surgery), bariatric surgery, respite care, hospital and community equipment and a deep-cleaning programme to address hospital infections across all trusts.

Invest to Save Projects - £15m

This funding would be applied to a range of projects that aim to deliver savings of some £8.5m - £9m per annum from 2012/13.

Specialist drugs - £5m

This would enable the purchase of anti TNFs/biological treatments for rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis, cochlear implants and will also contribute to reducing the backlog in NICE technical appraisals.

Capital schemes - £12m

This would enable significant improvements to be made to service delivery within the HSC Trusts to maintain existing services.

Bangor Town Centre: Street Parking

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any instances, in each of the last three years, when ambulances and fire engines have had their access obstructed due to on street parking in Bangor town centre.

(AQW 3302/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can advise that neither the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) nor Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) routinely records incidents of obstruction due to on-street parking. However, NIFRS records do show that during this three-year period there were no reports or complaints received about obstruction of fire engines due to on-street parking.

Physiotherapy: Waiting Times

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to address the waiting times for patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis who are in need of physiotherapy.

(AQW 3305/11-15)

Mr Poots: Physiotherapy services are available to anyone with an identified clinical need, including people with Rheumatoid Arthritis. The nature of a person's condition determines how quickly the service responds. No patient should wait longer than nine weeks to have their needs assessed and treated. The nine week access standard is currently not being achieved by Physiotherapy services and, consequently, the Public Health Agency, in conjunction with the HSC Board, is leading a process of engagement with all Trusts across Northern Ireland to establish the reasons for all breaches of the access standard and to agree recovery plans.

Meals on Wheels Service

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he intends to ensure that (i) the Meals on Wheels Service will continue to be available; and (ii) the meals are of a high nutritional standard.

(AQW 3312/11-15)

Mr Poots: Meals on Wheels services are provided, or arranged, by HSC Trusts for vulnerable people where a needs assessment shows that the person is unable to secure a nutritious cooked meal and therefore would be at risk of malnutrition, should a meal service not be provided. There are no plans to make substantive changes to the availability of the service for current recipients.

The nutritional value of meals is a specification included in contracts for the procurement of Meals on Wheels; however, all clients have the right to choose what they wish to eat and to source meals available from a range of providers.

Consultants

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the consultants employed by the (i) South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) Southern Health and Social Care Trust since 1 April 2007, and to detail the remuneration paid to each.

(AQW 3346/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the Data Protection Act 1998 it is inappropriate to release personal data relating to an individual and therefore details of remuneration paid to a named consultant cannot be provided.

Since April 2007 109 consultants have been employed at Southern Trust and 82 have been employed at South Eastern Trust at the appropriate point on the salary scale. The consultant scale for 2011/12 is £74,504 - £100,446.

Downe Hospital Site in Downpatrick

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made on the disposal of the old Downe Hospital site in Downpatrick.

(AQW 3381/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following disposal advice from Land & Property Services (LPS), a planning application for a mixed use scheme was submitted in May 2010 and approved by Planning Service and Down District Council in May 2011. Draft planning conditions are awaited from Planning Service. Once a Decision Notice is issued, the site will be disposed of in accordance with LPS advice.

Following a public sector trawl of the site in March 2010, Down District Council (DDC) and Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) registered interest. However, as LPS has not received any proposal for the site from DDC to demonstrate need, this interest is no longer being considered by LPS. NIHE remains interested in only part of the site for housing. However the impact of a part site disposal on the value and marketability of residual lands needs to be considered by LPS. Neither DSD nor Northern Ireland Tourist Board has expressed interest in the site.

The planning application was discussed with Paul Hogarth Company on behalf of DSD, in the context of DSD's Downpatrick Masterplan; the mixed use scheme is consistent with the proposed use specified for the site in DSD's Downpatrick Masterplan.

The current planning application was presented to Down District Council in February 2010 who were broadly content with the proposals.

There has been no approach by or consultation with Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Downe Hospital Site in Downpatrick

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions his Department has had with the (i) the Department for Social Development; (ii) the Northern Ireland Tourist Board ; and (iii) Down District Council in relation to the regeneration and tourism potential of the old Downe Hospital site in Downpatrick.

(AQW 3382/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following disposal advice from Land & Property Services (LPS), a planning application for a mixed use scheme was submitted in May 2010 and approved by Planning Service and Down District Council in May 2011. Draft planning conditions are awaited from Planning Service. Once a Decision Notice is issued, the site will be disposed of in accordance with LPS advice.

Following a public sector trawl of the site in March 2010, Down District Council (DDC) and Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) registered interest. However, as LPS has not received any proposal for the site from DDC to demonstrate need, this interest is no longer being considered by LPS. NIHE remains interested in only part of the site for housing. However the impact of a part site disposal on the value and marketability of residual lands needs to be considered by LPS. Neither DSD nor Northern Ireland Tourist Board has expressed interest in the site.

The planning application was discussed with Paul Hogarth Company on behalf of DSD, in the context of DSD's Downpatrick Masterplan; the mixed use scheme is consistent with the proposed use specified for the site in DSD's Downpatrick Masterplan.

The current planning application was presented to Down District Council in February 2010 who were broadly content with the proposals.

There has been no approach by or consultation with Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Health Service: Pay Bill

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2602/11-15, to provide an estimate of the level of funding that will be allocated to the steps required to be taken to reduce the pay bill of the Health Service in the 2011-2015 budget period.

(AQW 3417/11-15)

Mr Poots: Decisions on the future pattern of care that may be taken following the HSC Review will help determine what additional steps may be necessary to reduce pay bill costs further. Until those decisions are considered, definitive estimates or allocations cannot be made against pay bill costs.

Prescribing Formulary for Drugs: Development of

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2719/11-15, (i) when he expects the Joint Formulary for primary and secondary care to be completed and implemented; (ii) what notional formulary is being used in the interim; (iii) how he expects the new Formulary to differ from what is currently in use.

(AQW 3418/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The Health and Social Care Board is currently revising the processes for the implementation, management and review of a new Formulary with five chapters of the main therapeutic areas now drafted. The formulary will be issued following Board approval on the formulary process. The anticipated time-line for this is December 2011.

(ii) In the mean time, the Health and Social Care Board is providing specific guidance on individual therapeutic areas through their Medicines Management Forum. This guidance and advice on good medicines management practice can be viewed at:

(http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/medicinesmanagement/index.html). Other forms of prescribing guidance are also currently being utilised such as those available from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE).

(iii) The new Joint Formulary for primary and secondary care will present a preferred composite list of medicines for initiation and maintenance of treatment in at least 70% of first and second line treatment choices for patients, selected on the basis of the available evidence for their effectiveness to treat a condition, for their safety profile (including reduced likelihood of side effects) and for their cost-effectiveness.

Accident and Emergency Services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Area

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2721/11-15, when he plans to announce the arrangements for consultation on the reconfiguration of accident and emergency services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 3419/11-15)

Mr Poots: I hope to make an announcement shortly on the arrangements for consultation.

Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to his Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3429/11-15)

Mr Poots: Equality is mainstreamed within the Department and is part of the policy development process. Disaggregated costs for equality are not maintained or readily available.

Prescriptions

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many prescriptions have been issued by GPs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3453/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available. Information about prescriptions is only collated by HSC Business Services Organisation once they have been dispensed and submitted for payment. Not all prescriptions issued are subsequently dispensed and presented for payment, so the number of prescriptions issued by GPs, or any type of prescriber, is not known centrally. Information in relation to prescriptions that have been issued, dispensed and presented for payment is held centrally.

Department Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3499/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to provide this information as it could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Motivate Programme

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his Department's assessment of the success of the Motivate Programme being carried out at Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.

(AQW 3506/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Motivate Programme is an obesity intervention programme which makes use of behavioural principles to promote change in patients' health related behaviours. The programme primarily focuses on defining and understanding patients' eating and activity patterns.

It is an evidence based approach to lifestyle change, delivered over a 6 month period, on a bi-weekly basis. To date 121 have completed the pilot programme at the Causeway Hospital in Coleraine with another 73 individuals due to complete in December 2011.

Results from the initial pilot show a number of positive impacts affecting the participants and the Department awaits the findings which should demonstrate the long term impact of the programme on those participants who successfully completed the course.

Causeway Hospital: Maternity Services

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the ongoing review into maternity services, whether he can offer an assurance that maternity services at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine, are secure at present and in the future.

(AQW 3513/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 28 September, I launched a public consultation on a draft Maternity Strategy for Northern Ireland. The draft Strategy aims to provide women, professionals, policy makers and commissioners with a clear pathway for maternity services in Northern Ireland, from pre-conceptual care through to postnatal care.

The draft Strategy does not propose closing any of the maternity units; however, when the final strategy is published in 2012, it will be for commissioners and providers to take account of it when planning the shape of maternity services over the next 5 years.

The consultation closes on 23 December; I would urge anyone with an interest in maternity services to respond to the consultation.

Cerebral Angiogram

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients who underwent a cerebral angiogram since mid-August have not received the results.

(AQW 3535/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been informed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust that 25 patients have undergone a cerebral angiogram since the 15th August 2011. Five of these patients, all of whom underwent the procedure within the last month, are still to receive the results of the procedure.

Causeway Hospital: Admissions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2453/11-15, how many of the in-patients admitted to the Causeway Area Hospital were emergency admissions in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3537/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to determine how many of the inpatients stated in AQW 2453/11-15 were emergency admissions, these figures relate to patients admitted within all Programmes of Care i.e. Acute, Maternity & Child Health, Elderly Care, Mental Health and Learning Disability, and the elective/emergency split is not available for non Acute Programmes of Care.

The table below details the number of non elective admissions for patients treated under the Acute Programme of Care in each of the last five years.

Financial Year	Inpatients	Non Elective Admissions
2006/07	9,301	7,158
2007/08	10,142	7,885
2008/09	10,525	7,949
2009/10	10,386	7,975
2010/11	10,403	8,129

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System (HIS)

Notes

1. Inpatient admissions include both (a) patients admitted electively with the expectation that they will remain in hospital for at least one night, and (b) non-elective admissions (e.g. emergency admissions). A patient who is admitted with this intention but who leaves hospital for any reason without staying overnight is still counted as an inpatient. Day cases and regular attenders are not included.

Community Pharmacies

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many community pharmacies have closed since the recent cuts to the community pharmacy budget.

(AQW 3632/11-15)

Mr Poots: Any community pharmacy intending to close or cease providing health service pharmacy arrangements is legally required to give 3 months written notification to the Health and Social Care Board of their intention to do so. The HSC Board has advised that, to date, no such notifications have been received and that it continues to receive a significant number of new applications seeking to provide health service community pharmacy arrangements across Northern Ireland.

Department of Justice

Bench Warrants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Bench Warrants, including European Arrest Warrants, which were issued by Northern Ireland courts, are currently outstanding in each court division; and how many of these warrants were issued more than twelve months ago.

(AQW 3013/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The following table details the number of Arrest Warrants (Magistrates' Court and Youth Court) and Bench Warrants (Crown Court), including European Arrest Warrants, that are currently outstanding:

Court Division	Outstanding Warrants issued less than 12 months ago	Outstanding Warrants issued more than 12 months ago	Total
Antrim	63	408	471
Ards	77	322	399
Armagh and South Down	68	554	622
Belfast	398	1,579	1,977

Court Division	Outstanding Warrants issued less than 12 months ago	Outstanding Warrants issued more than 12 months ago	Total
Craigavon	100	639	739
Fermanagh and Tyrone	117	651	768
Londonderry	76	350	426
Total	**899**	**4,503**	**5,402**

Convictions for Corporate Manslaughter

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for corporate manslaughter, or similar offences, have been secured in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3043/11-15)

Mr Ford: The offence of corporate manslaughter was introduced in 2008 before which the offence of gross negligence manslaughter by a corporation applied. To date there have been no convictions for corporate manslaughter. The offence of corporate manslaughter has specific requirements and when there has been a death at a place of work, prosecution under the provisions of the Health and Safety (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 may be appropriate. Data from the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland shows that in 2007/8 there were five deaths prosecuted under the 1978 Order; seven in 2008/9; eleven in 2009/10; and five in 2010/11.

Level of Force that a Householder can use against an Intruder

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Justice to clarify the current legal position with regards to the level of force that a householder can use against an intruder.

(AQW 3046/11-15)

Mr Ford: Along with the common law defence of self-defence, Section 3(1) of the Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 provides that a person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime or in effecting or assisting in the lawful arrest of offenders or suspected offenders or of persons unlawfully at large. Section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 clarified the provisions of the 1967 Act and the common law defence of self-defence. Assessing the reasonableness of the level of force for the purposes of self-defence is a matter for the prosecuting authorities and the court.

Death of Kevin McDaid: Trial

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what the anticipated timeframe is for the trial of the people charged in connection with the death of Kevin McDaid in Coleraine in May 2009.

(AQW 3123/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prosecution file for this case is currently being prepared by the Public Prosecution Service for committal proceedings. That will be followed by arraignment in the Crown Court and then the case will be set down for trial.

It is not possible to provide a timeframe for the trial. However, all of the criminal justice agencies and the judiciary are committed to ensuring that cases progress to trial as quickly as possible.

Released Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners have been released to no fixed abode upon completion of a custodial sentence in each of the last three years, broken by court division.

(AQW 3126/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not available.

Separated Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether separated prisoners, who are ill, are transferred to the hospital wing if their condition was such that they would be transferred to the hospital wing if they were non-separated prisoners.

(AQW 3268/11-15)

Mr Ford: Admission to the healthcare wing within the prison, or transfer to an NHS facility, is directed by clinical need. This assessment and the admission process is the same for all prisoners irrespective of whether separated or non-separated.

Maghaberry Prison: Disturbance at Roe House

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2825/11-15, to detail (i) the total cost of the damaged caused as a result of this incident; (ii) where the prisoners were held when their cells were rendered unusable, including whether they remained in Roe House Maghaberry Prison as separated prisoners; (iii) what action has been taken to prevent a recurrence of any such behaviour; and (iv) whether the Prisoner Ombudsman has been notified of the damage and what was the response.

(AQW 3269/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) The total cost of damage caused as a result of this incident was £8,800.

(ii) Following the damage caused to their cells each prisoner was removed and relocated to another cell on the ground floor (Roe 4) landing. They remained as separated prisoners.

(iii) Before the prisoners were relocated the sanitary ware was removed and water supply cut off from the appropriate number of cells on Roe 4 to prevent a recurrence of any such behaviour.

(iv) The Prisoner Ombudsman was not notified of the damage.

Desertcreat Training College: Tender Specification

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Justice how he intends to ensure that adequate social clauses are built in to the tender specification for the Desertcreat Training College.

(AQW 3288/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Desertcreat Training College Project Team will be working closely with Central Procurement Directorate of DFP and the Strategic Investment Board, who are leading on the development of Social Clauses for all public sector contracts in Northern Ireland, to ensure that adequate social clauses are built into the tender specification for the College. These will contain requirements in relation to the provisions for apprenticeships, long term unemployed people and SMEs subject to European Procurement regulations.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail any financial pressures that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3316/11-15)

Mr Ford: Given the Department of Justice's ringfenced funding status, it did not declare any pressures to the Department of Finance and Personnel as part of the October in-year monitoring round.

The main pressure currently facing the Department this year relates to legal aid funding. The Department plans to fund this, together with any other pressures that emerge in-year, from within the funding currently available.

Maghaberry Prison: Disturbance at Roe House

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to make a statement on the lead-up to the disturbance which occurred at Roe House, Maghaberry Prison on 6 May 2011 and the damage which ensued.

(AQW 3322/11-15)

Mr Ford: From early 2011 a number of prisoners in separated republican accommodation in Roe House had indicated that they planned to embark on some type of protest action. Despite the agreement of 12 August 2010, which removed the requirement for routine full body searching within the prison, the protest action is based on prisoners' calls for the further removal of the requirement for full body searching both entering and leaving prison, and for unrestricted movement and numbers on Roe three and four landings.

On 6 May 11 prisoners engaged in protest action and caused damage to their cells. All 11 prisoners damaged the sanitary- ware, cell furniture and spyglasses in their cells.

Maghaberry Prison: Disturbance at Roe House

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2825/11-15 whether he will consider revising the figure given for the number of separated prisoners involved and charged with criminal damage during the disturbance which occurred at Roe House, Maghaberry Prison on 6 May 2011.

(AQW 3325/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total number of separated prisoners involved in the disturbance on 6 May was in fact 11. One of the prisoners involved was released on bail on 22 May. The remaining ten are currently in Roe House.

Gerry McGeough

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Gerry McGeough is a separated prisoner and whether he has signed the required Compact.

(AQW 3326/11-15)

Mr Ford: Gerry McGeough is a separated prisoner and has signed the required compact.

Gerry McGeough

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the claims made in the press by prisoner Gerry McGeough regarding conditions in Maghaberry Prison and the treatment he has received there after being discharged from hospital.

(AQW 3357/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr McGeough was discharged from an outside hospital back to Maghaberry Prison on 27 September 2011. When a prisoner is discharged from an outside hospital to return to prison custody, the receiving prison will take cognisance of any discharge advice from the hospital, this can include a short stay in a prison health care unit.

Mr McGeough is not on protest and as such is in a clean cell. All other areas of the wing on which Mr McGeough is housed are cleaned daily by industrial cleaners. The prison closely monitors contamination levels within the area and the results of recent tests carried out have not shown cause for concern.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail any easements that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3431/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice declared a ringfenced Resource DEL easement of £11m to the Department of Finance and Personnel as part of the October in-year monitoring round.

Custodial Sentences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2052/11-15, in the cases in which an appeal was allowed and the outcome was varied or reversed, how many of the defendants went on to commit an offence within two years of their appeal decision.

(AQW 3437/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information provided in the answer to AQW2052/11-15 cannot be disaggregated further without incurring disproportionate cost.

Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3019/11-15, why a different approach was taken by his Department on tax and National Insurance deduction in the Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme than that taken by the Department of Finance and Personnel in the Equal Pay settlement; and for his assessment of how this demonstrates a joined-up Government approach.

(AQW 3466/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme was an ex gratia scheme and its terms cannot be compared to the settlement of the equal pay claim against DFP. The tax and national insurance liabilities arising from the gratuity payment were met in line with advice provided by HMRC. A central agreement – whereby tax and national insurance liabilities would be deducted before the quantum of the payment payable to individuals in each band was calculated – would have worked to the advantage of higher-rate tax payers and to the disadvantage of those who pay little or no tax.

The Equal pay settlement is a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Complaints Against a Parole Commissioner

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what mechanisms are in place to deal with complaints against a Parole Commissioner that could lead to suspension and dismissal.

(AQW 3509/11-15)

Mr Ford: Paragraph (3) (d) of Schedule 4 of the Criminal Justice Order 2008 provides the legislative basis for the dismissal of Parole Commissioners. The process involves consultation with the Lord Chief Justice.

In the event of a complaint that could lead to suspension and dismissal, the matter would be referred to the Lord Chief Justice to be handled in accordance with procedures approved by him.

Parole Process

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what steps are being taken to remove the automatic right of prisoners to an oral hearing following the Single Parole Commissioner stage of the parole process.

(AQW 3511/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department is currently working with the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland (PCNI) and the relevant criminal justice agencies to update the Parole Commissioners' Rules (Northern Ireland) 2009. This includes a review of the right of certain offenders to an automatic oral hearing. With

justice partners, my officials are in the process of refining our proposals. However, before we can bring forward a revised draft of the rules, we must first await a Court of Appeal judgement which will directly address the issue of access to oral hearings. In due course, the draft rules will be subject to the proper Assembly procedures, including consultation with the Justice Committee.

Separated Republican Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what terms or conditions the separated Republican prisoners are protesting against in refusing to conform to prison rules.

(AQW 3523/11-15)

Mr Ford: The demands set out in the reply to AQW 2902/11-15 are the basis for protest action by Republican Separated Prisoners. The main issues being contested are full body searching and controlled movement. Prisoners contend that the Prison Service is in breach of the terms of the 12 August 2010 agreement. Refusal to comply with a full body search is a breach of Prison Rule 16. Refusal to comply with controlled movement is a breach of Prison Rule 38 (23) "disobeys or fails to comply with any rule or regulation applying to him".

Maghaberry Prison: Disturbance at Roe House

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether a public statement was issued by his Department or the Prison Service in relation to the incident on 6 May 2011 in which separated Republican prisoners caused extensive damage to Roe House.

(AQW 3529/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service does not routinely issue statements on disturbances within its establishments. In relation to the above incident, the Prison Service did respond to a number of media enquiries.

Conditional Discharge

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been dealt with by Conditional Discharge in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 3531/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number of convictions dealt with by conditional discharge, by court division, for the calendar years 2004 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

NUMBER OF PEOPLE DISPOSED BY MEANS OF CONDITIONAL DISCHARGE BY COURT DIVISION 2004-2008

	Year				
Court division	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Antrim	115	104	83	106	97
Ards	264	183	99	143	131
Armagh and South Down	163	150	150	162	174
Belfast	548	473	376	427	352
Craigavon and Lisburn	105	111	99	116	127
Fermanagh and Tyrone	169	114	126	212	147
Londonderry	205	219	192	212	203
Total	**1,569**	**1,354**	**1,125**	**1,378**	**1,231**

Data for 2004 to 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems. Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Department Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice to detail his Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each year since May 2010 in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3539/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ) is unable to provide this information in the format requested because it is not recorded in this way on the DOJ finance system.

Speeding Offences

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted of speeding offences in each of the last two years.

(AQW 3755/11-15)

Mr Ford: Speeding offences may be prosecuted under Article 7(9) and Article 43 of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and Article 19(a) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981.

The table below gives the number convicted by court division for the calendar years 2007 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible to provide prosecution data for this period.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE CONVICTED FOR SPEEDING OFFENCES 2007-2008

Year	2007	2008
Convictions	3,580	2,847

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Prison Review Team: Annex 1 of the Final Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) in relation to the figures contained in Annex 1 of the Final Report of the Prison Review Team; and (ii) in the prison population generally, to detail the number of prisoners in each religious background category who were convicted of, or are awaiting trial on, scheduled offences.

(AQW 3812/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) The number of prisoners in each religious background category who are convicted of, or are awaiting trial on, scheduled offences, in relation to Annex 1 of the Final report of the Prison Review Team is set out in Tables 1 - 3 below.

Note: The figures relating to basic and enhanced privileges level, and the segregation unit, refer to the average percentage of the prisoner population (snapshot taken on the first day of each month). The figures relating to adjudications, use of force and the number of approved leave applications refer to the average number of incidences of adjudication, use of force and approved leave applications (snapshot taken on the first day of each month) and not necessarily to individual prisoners.

PERCENTAGE OF PRISONERS BY RELIGION IN DIFFERENT CATEGORIES, JANUARY – JUNE 2011

TABLE 1

Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre (excludes adults)				
	Catholic	**Catholic (Scheduled)**	**Protestant**	**Protestant (Scheduled)**
Average % Population	56%	0	34%	0
Basic Privileges Level	74% (63)		21% (17)	
Enhanced privileges level	49% (242)		43% (213)	
Adjudications	62% (367)		24% (143)	
Use of Force	61% (33)		22% (12)	
In Segregation Unit	71% (22)		19% (6)	
Approved Leave Applications	36% (36)		64% (63)	

TABLE 2

HMP Maghaberry (excludes Young Adults and Separated Prisoners)				
	Catholic	**Catholic (Scheduled)**	**Protestant**	**Protestant (Scheduled)**
Average % Population	54%	9	34%	17
Basic Privileges Level	66% (101)	*4	21% (32)	0
Enhanced privileges level	44% (850)	5	41% (789)	17
Adjudications	67% (407)	3	23% (142)	4
Use of Force	68% (133)	1	20% (40)	0
In Segregation Unit	64% (54)	1	28% (24)	3
Approved Leave Applications	36% (65)	2	64% (118)	6

* figure includes Inmates on Basic or Standard Regime

TABLE 3

Table 3 - HMP Magilligan (excludes Young Adults)				
	Catholic	**Catholic (Scheduled)**	**Protestant**	**Protestant Scheduled**
Average % Population	56%	2	35%	2
Basic Privileges Level	82% (91)	0	16% (18)	0
Enhanced privileges level	52% (1008)	2	38% (738)	2
Adjudications	73% (178)	0	21% (52)	0
Use of Force	95% (18)	0	5% (1)	0
In Segregation Unit	67% (22)	0	27% (9)	0
Approved Leave Applications	58% (425)	0	37% (275)	0

(ii) The number of prisoners in each religious background category who are convicted of, or are awaiting trial on, scheduled offences, in relation to the overall prisoner population by establishment is set out in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4

Prisoner Population on 25 October 2011							
	Number of Inmates in Custody	Protestant	Catholic	Others	Number of Inmates with Scheduled Offences	Protestant Scheduled	Roman Catholic Scheduled
Hydebank Wood	280	80	153	47	0	0	0
Maghaberry	988	335	507	146	70	27	43
Magilligan	519	183	286	50	4	2	2
Total	1787	598	946	243	74	29	45

These figures were correct as at 25 October 2011.

Department for Regional Development

Dropped Kerb Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what dropped kerb schemes are planned for the Millisle area for the next two financial years.

(AQW 2997/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 1815/11-15.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any implications for the A5 road scheme following his announcement on funding for the Coleraine to Londonderry railway line.

(AQW 3015/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Phase one of the Coleraine to Londonderry rail re-lay, which is estimated to cost £27 million in 2012/13, will be financed by pro-actively managing the Department's Budget by re-profiling some planned strategic road schemes. This will provide £22 million of the required funding, with Translink providing the balance.

The choice of road schemes to be re-profiled will need to take account of commitments made by the Irish Government in respect of the A5/A8 schemes, the current state of progress on these and other roads schemes, including the A2 and A6 schemes, risks arising from procurement and critically, the capacity of the construction industry to deliver on the roads programme.

I should advise that with the significant scale of planned investment on the A5 and A8 in 2012/13, if a diminution of the budget profile by up to £22 million were to reflect on these two schemes alone, it would have a limited impact on the commencement dates, and would still facilitate full scale construction starting in 2012/13, albeit a month or two later than previously estimated.

Airport Passenger Numbers

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the change in passenger numbers using (i) Belfast International Airport; (ii) Belfast City Airport; and (iii) Londonderry Airport between 1 April 1998 and 1 April 2011.

(AQW 3016/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The data in the table below is supplied by the Civil Aviation Authority. Figures are only available by calendar year. The figures for 2011 are not yet available.

TERMINAL PASSENGER TRAFFIC VIA NI BY AIRPORT: 1998-2010

	Number of terminal passengers		
Year	**Belfast International**	**George Best Belfast City**	**City Of Derry**
1998	2,625,825	1,313,442	49,095
1999	3,011,734	1,281,963	103,504
2000	3,127,337	1,288,164	162,704
2001	3,602,702	1,191,973	187,519
2002	3,551,103	1,889,692	199,146
2003	3,954,432	1,974,036	205,505
2004	4,402,500	2,090,923	234,487
2005	4,819,512	2,236,977	199,357
2006	5,015,264	2,105,597	341,531
2007	5,236,055	2,186,867	427,586
2008	5,222,839	2,570,741	438,996
2009	4,536,498	2,621,733	345,857
2010	4,010,972	2,740,305	338,505

Source: CAA

Note: A terminal passenger is a traveller who boards or disembarks an aircraft on a commercial flight at the reporting Northern Ireland airport. The term therefore excludes transit passengers who remain on board aircraft which land at the airport and then depart for another destination.

Quay Lane Car Park, Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the ruling by an independent adjudicator in December 2010 that the signage in Quay Lane Car Park, Enniskillen was "confusing and ambiguous" (i) how many parking tickets have been issued at this car park since that ruling; (ii) whether these tickets are enforceable; and (iii) what plans are in place to rectify the problem with the signage and the faded parking bay lines in Quay Lane South Car Park.

(AQW 3029/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Adjudicator's ruling to which the Member refers, is dated 9 May 2011 and relates to a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) issued on 16 December 2010 in the car-park at Quay Lane North, Enniskillen.

In the period since the Adjudicator's ruling, to the end of September 2011, 245 PCNs were issued to vehicles parked in Quay Lane North car-park for various parking contraventions. All PCNs are enforceable unless cancelled as a result of a Challenge, Representation or formal Appeal.

Following the Adjudicator's decision Roads Service provided additional lines in the car-park to identify a non parking area.

Roads Service has no plans to renew the parking bay markings as funding is not currently available for this type of work.

Translink: Budget Plans

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his budget plans for Translink for each of the next four years.

(AQW 3050/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below sets out the budget plans for Translink for each of the next four years:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Translink Funding	**£k**	**£k**	**£k**	**£k**
Revenue Funding				
Rail	33,507	32,702	33,458	29,507
Bus	35,744	37,244	31,444	32,944
Total Revenue	**69,251**	**69,946**	**64,902**	**62,451**
Capital Funding				
Rail	92,065	18,646	11,327	30,404
Bus	12,864	2,800	58	1,400
Total Capital	**104,929**	**21,446**	**11,385**	**31,804**
Total Funding	**174,180**	**91,392**	**76,287**	**94,255**

The figures above have not been adjusted for recent announcements made in respect of Londonderry to Coleraine track re-lay or on street car parking charges in Provincial towns. It is intended to confirm these adjustments when budget mechanisms allow.

Down Community Transport

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding Down Community Transport has received from his Department in this financial year; and what is the proposed allocation for each of the next four years.

(AQW 3051/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Based upon the Business plan submitted by Down Community Transport for the financial year 2011/2012, my Department, through the auspices of the Rural Transport Fund, has awarded funding to this organisation of £395,619. Allocations for the next four years cannot be determined until Business plans from Down Community Transport to cover that period are received and agreed.

Londonderry to Coleraine Railway Line

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the annual number of passengers who will use the Londonderry to Coleraine railway line after the upgrade work is completed.

(AQW 3124/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that whilst it is difficult to be precise in making forward passenger projections, they estimate that with the increase in train frequencies and journey time improvements,

they would anticipate future growth at up to 10% per annum over the coming years on the Coleraine to Londonderry line.

The number of passengers using the line for the 2010/11 year was 292,488.

NI Water

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans NI Water has to deal with potential severe winter weather in North Down.

(AQW 3132/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its Major Incident Plan has been revised following lessons learned from last winter and it is now better prepared to handle the effects of severe weather conditions. A substantial amount of work has been undertaken which focused on communication, contingency planning, supply failures and governance. The Major Incident Plan aims to provide a fully planned response to all types of emergency and includes a range of contingency plans for specific types of events including severe weather conditions.

The Utility Regulator's report into NIW's handling of the 2010/11 freeze/thaw concluded that 80% of the additional water demand caused by the severe weather conditions leaked from private domestic and business water pipes. To raise public awareness of the need to protect water supply pipes, NIW has commenced an extensive winter awareness campaign using a wide range of media outlets. The key message is 'Don't Wait, Insulate' and the campaign will include a leaflet drop to properties throughout North Down and across Northern Ireland. The campaign has also promoted the 'lag and tag' message to ensure customers are aware of the location of their stop valve in the event of a burst pipe.

NIW has also enhanced its plans for the provision of alternative drinking water supplies in the event of severe weather conditions. Alternative water supply locations have been identified for distribution of drinking water to customers using static water tanks, wheel mounted towable bowsers, tankers, standpipes or bottled water.

Shuttle Bus Service Between Belfast and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of students who travel from Belfast to the University of Ulster, Jordanstown on a daily basis by public transport; (ii) the cost of a return ticket; and (iii) the cost to Translink of providing a free shuttle service on this route.

(AQW 3134/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is not possible to detail of the number of students who travel on public transport from Belfast to the University of Ulster, Jordanstown. The Translink bus ticketing system does not identify passengers who are students and passenger data is not available for those students who travel with other operators.

The cost of a day return ticket from Belfast to University of Ulster, Jordanstown using the Ulsterbus UniLink from Botanic Avenue to Jordanstown or using the rail service from Botanic to Jordanstown (student rate) is £3.60. Passengers using the Metro 2G bus service are charged £2 for a single journey.

I have insufficient data on which to make a meaningful estimate of the cost of a free shuttle service.

Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Line

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the current journey time on a train from Coleraine to Londonderry; and what is the expected journey time after the completion of phase 1 of the relay in April 2013.

(AQW 3137/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that present rail journey times between Coleraine and Londonderry range from 45-50 minutes. Time variations arise because of different train stopping/train passing patterns

during the day. They anticipate that journey times will reduce by 4 to 5 minutes in each direction following the completion of Phase 1 of the planned re-lay work.

It must be noted that without Phase 1 of the re-lay project additional speed restrictions would have increased journey times by at least 3 to 5 minutes.

Brookeborough Roads Service Depot

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to outline the financial rationale for moving the Brookeborough Roads Service Depot to Fivemiletown; (ii) whether a feasibility study was carried out to assess the cost implications of the move; and (iii) if a study was undertaken, if he will provide a copy of the study.

(AQW 3157/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service continually reviews its operations with the objective of ensuring that they are both effective and efficient. Faced with the challenge of delivering its services within the limitations of the Executive's Budget 2010 settlement, it reviewed all of its costs, with a view to identifying potential efficiencies. One of the options identified where potential efficiencies could be achieved was through a rationalisation of its depot structure. A subsequent review confirmed that efficiencies could be achieved by closing a number of depots, including Brookeborough depot, which is due to close in December 2011. The services currently delivered from Brookeborough depot will continue to be delivered from the Roads Service depot at Fivemiletown, where the staff will be relocated.

Roads Service carried out a review of Brookeborough depot, which considered the operational and economic implications of retaining the existing depot, relocating to Silverhill depot in Enniskillen and relocating to Fivemiletown depot. I have asked Roads Service to provide the Member with a copy of this review.

Spencer Street Area of Holywood: Weed Problems

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to address the weed problems in the Spencer Street area of Holywood.

(AQW 3188/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the weed growth in the Spencer Street area of Holywood was identified during a recent inspection. Work is currently underway to remove the weeds and should be completed before the end of October 2011.

Sewerage Infrastructure Problems in the Millisle Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to address the sewerage infrastructure problems in the Millisle area.

(AQW 3189/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is planning a capital investment of £2.2 million to upgrade the Millisle sewerage system to meet EU Bathing Water Standards and to reduce the risk of property flooding.

The upgrading work is being undertaken in two phases. The first phase of construction has already commenced in the Moss Road area of Millisle and is due to be completed in early 2012. This will reduce spills to the beach and flooding risks on Main Street/Donaghadee Road. The second phase involves the provision of a new sewage pumping station (planned to be located in the Ballycopeland Presbyterian church car park) a new 300 metre long sea outfall to be laid under the beach and associated land based pipelines. This will reduce the risk of out-of-sewer flooding at Shore Road.

NIW is currently in consultation with representatives of Ballycopeland Presbyterian church regarding site acquisition and will consult with local residents prior to seeking formal planning permission.

NIW expects construction to commence during 2012, subject to successful site acquisition and the satisfactory completion of all statutory approvals.

In the interim, NIW will continue to maintain the existing pumping station and associated infrastructure in order to minimise the risk of out-of-sewer flooding.

Footpaths in the Ashfield Area of Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to repair the footpaths in the Ashfield area of Donaghadee.

(AQW 3190/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 61/11-15 and can confirm that the position remains unchanged.

Road Markings in the North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of refreshing road markings in the North Down area in the last financial year.

(AQW 3191/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total cost of refreshing road markings in the North Down area for the financial year 2010/11 was approximately £22,000.

Footpaths

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to ensure that footpaths are free from obstructions to people who are visually impaired.

(AQW 3221/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is highly cognisant of the need to ensure the safety of visually impaired members of the public who use footpaths. The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 empowers the Department to take action to remove obstructions.

Roads Service will intervene and consider the removal of obstacles from footpaths usually in circumstances where a complaint is made by a member of the public. It will request the removal of any obstacles which are considered to compromise the safety of members of the public using the footpath, and in doing so, is particularly mindful of the risks posed to those who may be visually impaired.

Audio-visual Information Systems to Buses

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department will support the extension of audio-visual information systems to buses.

(AQW 3222/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department, in partnership with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and Translink, is currently running a three-month audio visual pilot on bus services on the 5A Metro route in east Belfast. The pilot project is intended to assess the benefits of audio visual systems for all passengers and in particular for those with visual impairments, hearing impairments and older people. A full evaluation of the pilot project will be carried out by the Department. Future decisions about the extension of audio visual information systems will be taken in light of the evaluation and the resources available at the time.

Public Transport

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to improve the public perception of, and attitude towards, the use of public transport.

(AQW 3223/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Travelwise Northern Ireland initiative is seeking to promote, and raise the awareness levels of the general public, towards more sustainable transport options including cycling, walking, greater use of public transport. This includes car sharing and park and ride facilities, in order to encourage a change in public attitudes away from the private car as the main mode of travel in Northern Ireland.

In addition my Department established an Active Travel Forum during March 2010 with the principal aim of drawing up a high level strategy for active travel, setting out the framework to help people choose more sustainable and active transport modes, including walking and cycling for shorter everyday journeys and linked to public transport for longer trips. The draft Active Travel strategy, is currently being finalised and will set out the strategic context and vision, as well as proposals for future programme and partnership delivery mechanisms.

Information about the range of Travelwise initiatives can be found at www.nidirect.gov.uk/travelwiseni.

In consultation with key stakeholders, my Department is also taking steps to implement the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This legislation enables contracts be awarded and introduces a new system of regulation for public transport services, helping to ensure that decisions on services are taken in the public interest.

In recognition of the importance of Park and Ride in promoting sustainable transport, and with the aim of developing proposals which would offer the best prospect of maximising modal shift away from the private car to public transport, my Department recently published a Strategic review of Park and Ride including the provision of quality bus corridors. The Review sets out a number of conclusions and recommendations, and identifies those Park and Ride sites which the Department will aim to prioritise as available funding permits.

In the most recent Passengers Charter monitor (spring 2011), Translink met or exceeded all reliability and punctuality targets for both bus and rail. In addition, customer satisfaction also remains at very high levels.

Translink recently announced there will be no fares increase in 2011 across bus and rail services. Fares being frozen combined with a high quality bus and rail service means that there has never been a better time to switch to public transport.

Reflecting the depth of commitment to continue to invest in improving public transport, the table below sets out the budget plans for Translink for each of the next four years:

	2011/12	**2012/13**	**2013/14**	**2014/15**
Translink Funding	**£k**	**£k**	**£k**	**£k**
Revenue Funding				
Rail	33,507	32,702	33,458	29,507
Bus	35,744	37,244	31,444	32,944
Total Revenue	**69,251**	**69,946**	**64,902**	**62,451**
Capital Funding				
Rail	92,065	18,646	11,327	30,404
Bus	12,864	2,800	58	1,400

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Translink Funding	**£k**	**£k**	**£k**	**£k**
Total Capital	**104,929**	**21,446**	**11,385**	**31,804**
Total Funding	**174,180**	**91,392**	**76,287**	**94,255**

The figures above have not been adjusted for recent announcements made in respect of Londonderry to Coleraine track relay or on street car parking charges in Provincial towns. It is intended to confirm these adjustments when budget mechanisms allow.

Illegally Selling Cars on a Public Footpath or Road

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how many (i) companies; and (ii) individuals have been cautioned or fined for illegally selling cars on a public footpath or road in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3236/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not record details of the number of companies and individuals that have been cautioned or fined for illegally selling cars on a public footpath or road.

However, Roads Service would contact car sellers on an informal basis and advise of the restrictions on offering vehicles for sale, as covered by the Roads Order (NI). Such approaches are generally successful and it has not been necessary to divert any resources in pursuit of prosecution action.

Translink: New Rolling Stock

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development when Translink will begin using the new rolling stock on the rail network; and to detail the new trains' maximum speed.

(AQW 3244/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that the first three of the new trains entered into passenger service on 29 September 2011 on the Larne line. The next 2 units are due to be introduced during November 2011. It is anticipated that all units will be in service during 2012.

The maximum speed of the Class 4000 rolling stock is 90 mph.

Cotton Area, North Down: Proposed Road Safety Measures

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed road safety measures for the Cotton area of North Down.

(AQW 3257/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently has no proposals to introduce road safety measures at this location. However, it is currently undertaking an assessment of a scheme to improve junction visibility at the A48 Newtownards Road/Bailie Terrace junction, in the Cotton area.

The results of this assessment will determine whether the scheme is included in a future programme of improvement works for the Ards Borough Council Area.

I have asked my officials to contact you directly when the outcome of the assessment is known.

Traffic Calming Measures

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development what traffic calming measures are planned for the (i) Newtownabbey Borough Council area; and (ii) Antrim Borough Council area in each of the next three years.

(AQW 3280/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

I can also advise that the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

Footpath Resurfacing Schemes

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development what footpath resurfacing schemes are planned for the (i) Newtownabbey Borough Council area; and (ii) Antrim Borough Council area in each of the next three years.

(AQW 3281/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 3280/11-15.

Grit Boxes

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to increase the number of grit boxes in the (i) Newtownabbey Borough Council area; and (ii) Antrim Borough Council area in preparation for this winter.

(AQW 3282/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it already maintains a large number of grit boxes and grit piles at various locations in both the Newtownabbey and Antrim Borough Council Areas. The table below lists the locations at which new grit boxes are to be provided in the near future:

Provision of New Grit Boxes	
Council Area	**Location**
Newtownabbey	Knockane Way, Cloughfern
	Sharonmore Avenue, Ballyduff
Antrim	Dunadry Road, Antrim

Roads Service commits significant resources to maintaining, and regularly replenishing, approximately 4,200 grit boxes and over 39,000 grit piles provided on public roads. All requests from the public are assessed against the criteria set out in its Winter Service Policy and Procedure Guide. Salt boxes are provided at those locations that meet the criteria. However, new grit boxes will not be provided unless requested by a member of the public, who also agrees to spread the salt provided.

Road Lighting Schemes

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development what road lighting schemes are planned for the (i) Newtownabbey Borough Council area; and (ii) Antrim Borough Council area in each of the next four years, broken down by ward.

(AQW 3283/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 3280/11-15.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any financial pressures that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3315/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The October Monitoring Round was discussed and agreed at the Executive meeting on 20 October and presented to the Assembly on 24 October.

The Statement to the Assembly on the outcome of the October Monitoring Round can be found on the DFP website. The published Statement includes a table (Table D) which provides details of bids to meet financial pressures for DRD and all other NI Departments.

The Statement can be found using the link below:

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/2011-12-october-monitoring-round-statement.pdf

Arm's-length Bodies

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has (a) carried out any value for money audits on its arm's-length bodies; and (b) identified any savings that could be made by these bodies.

(AQW 3333/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has two arm's-length bodies: Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC), parent company of Northern Ireland Railways, Ulsterbus and Citybus (trading as Metro) which operate under the brand name of Translink.

NIW

Under the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 NI Water (NIW) is regulated by the Utility Regulator. The Regulator's responsibilities include promoting the economy and efficiency of NIW. The Regulator sets targets for NIW as part of its Price Control process. The current Price Control ("PC10"), which covers the period 2010 – 13, set challenging efficiency targets for NIW. The Regulator's PC10 Final Determination (published February 2010) highlighted cumulative savings on operational expenditure of £65m to be delivered over the PC10 period. The company's PC Monitoring Plan states NIW's aim to reduce annual operational expenditure from £198m to £176m over the PC10 period. NIW is on track to meet these challenging efficiency targets which are well above those faced generally across the public sector.

NITHC

In November 2010 the Department completed a review of the Outline Business Case for Public Transport Reform, which included a review of cost efficiency and cost effectiveness of the three Translink companies - Ulsterbus, Metro and Northern Ireland Railways. The review identified the savings which had been achieved over the previous two years and estimated the scope for further savings, taking account of various factors that are unique to the public transport sector in Northern Ireland. A copy of the review is available on the Department's web site via the link below.

Public Transport Reform Outline Business Case | My Department is also participating in the arm's-length body review being conducted centrally by the Budget Review Group to establish the scope for abolition, merger or absorption into departmental structures of each body. The Budget Review Group is expected to convey its recommendations to the Executive in due course.

Car Parking in Housing Estates

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 1295/10, to provide an update on the review of the policy for providing car parking in housing estates; and to detail how his Department plans to address the lack of car parking spaces in older housing estates.

(AQW 3336/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's policy, 'Car Parking Facilities in Existing Social Housing Estates', was issued in February 2011. This policy sets out how my Department's Roads Service will consider requests for parking facilities in older social housing estates, where provision for car parking does not comply with current standards.

While it is not my Department's policy to provide parking for amenity reasons, or to address the lack of car parking in older housing estates, it is recognised that, in some circumstances, a facility may be needed where there are traffic progression or road safety concerns. The main aspect of the policy, issued earlier this year, addresses traffic progression issues.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any easements that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3359/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The October Monitoring Round was discussed and agreed at the Executive meeting on 20 October and presented to the Assembly on 24 October.

The Statement to the Assembly on the outcome of the October Monitoring round can be found on the DFP website. The published Statement includes tables (Tables A and G) detailing the easements (Reduced Requirements) that have been identified by my Department and all other NI Departments.

The Statement can be found using the link below:

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/2011-12-october-monitoring-round-statement.pdf

Daily Traffic Levels

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the latest available daily traffic levels on (i) the A8 between Larne and Ballyclare; (ii) the A8 between Ballynure and Bruslee; and (iii) the A57 between Ballynure and Ballyclare.

(AQW 3367/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service collects data from automatic traffic counting sites located throughout the Northern Ireland and details of the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) traffic flow information, recorded at various locations on the A8, are provided in the table below.

Unfortunately, information is not available for the A57, between Ballynure and Ballyclare. However, I have included details for the A57 near Templepatrick.

Road	Census Point No	Location	AADT (7 day)	Year
A8	135	Larne – Ballynure, at Craiginorne	13,506	2011
A8	120	Larne – Ballynure, at Drumnahoe	18,612	2009

Road	Census Point No	Location	AADT (7 day)	Year
A8	233	Belfast Road, North of Coleman's Corner	10,719	2009
A57	148	Ballyclare Road, Templepatrick	13,292	2010

Vehicles Entering Armagh City

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development, based on the most recent traffic count results, to detail the number of vehicles entering Armagh City from the (i) A29 Moy Road; (ii) A3 Portadown Road; (iii) A3 Monaghan Road; (iv) A28 Newry Road; (v) A28 Killylea Road; (vi) A29 Keady Road; and (vii) A51 Hamiltonsbawn Road.

(AQW 3388/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it collects data from approximately 300 automatic traffic counting sites located throughout the Northern Ireland road network.

Unfortunately, there are no figures available for the A51 Hamiltonsbawn Road and only temporary count data available on the A28 Killylea Road. However, details of the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT), traffic flow information, recorded at the other locations requested are provided in the table below:

Road	Location	Direction (AADT 7 Day)	Direction (AADT 7 Day)	2 Way (AADT)	Year
A29	Armagh Road, Armagh	To Moy 5,169	To Armagh 5,230	10,399	2011
A3	Portadown – Armagh, at Stonebridge	To Armagh 5,787	To Portadown 6,023	11,810	2011
A3	Armagh – Middleton, at Milford	To Armagh 3,091	To Border 3,052	6,143	2011
A28	Armagh – Newry, at Markethill	To Newry 4,807	To Armagh 4,662	9,469	2011
A28	Killylea Rd @ St Light 0524	To Armagh 3,392	From Armagh 2,295	5,687	2007
A29	Armagh - Keady	To Armagh 2,732	To Keady 2,712	5,444	2011

DRD Property Clean-up

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to carry out a clean-up of his Department's property, such as road signs, poles and kerb-stones, which have been defaced with sectarian flags. paint and messages advocating support of terror groups.

(AQW 3396/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service does not approve or support the unauthorised use of the Department's property for any purpose. However, the Member will appreciate that the removal of sectarian motivated signs and emblems is an issue that needs to be handled sensitively as it has the potential to create tension within local communities and consideration must also be given to the risk of escalating the problem. In addition, Roads Service must have due regard to the safety of its staff that are involved in removing/treating such items.

When Roads Service becomes aware of such signs or emblems on its property, it will assess the situation to determine if action can be taken, either directly or in support of others. This often involves working with elected and local community representatives and the PSNI.

Roads Service gives priority to situations that are considered to present a road safety hazard, for example, signs or painting on the face of road signs, etc.

Salt or Grit Boxes

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of salt or grit boxes sited in the (a) Coleraine Borough Council area; and (b) Limavady Borough Council area in 2010; (ii) the number of boxes that have gone missing from these areas; and (iii) the number that will be sited in these areas for the 2011 winter period.

(AQW 3398/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of salt boxes sited in the Coleraine and Limavady Borough Council areas in 2010 and 2011 and the number of boxes that have gone missing in those areas, are set out in the table below:-

	Limavady	**Coleraine**
Salt Boxes sited in 2010	178	250
Salt Boxes sited in 2011	185	256
No of Boxes that have gone missing	Nil	2

Cost of Answering Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average cost to his Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3446/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department for Regional Development does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

Derry City: Residents' Parking Scheme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the resident's parking scheme for Derry City.

(AQW 3488/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a local consultation exercise has been successfully completed on proposals for a scheme in the Bogside area of Londonderry and details are being finalised in preparation for the necessary legislative procedures.

Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to his Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3505/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Equality Schemes have been in place in the Department for Regional Development since 2001. Implementation of the Department's commitments under the first scheme and the latest scheme, which was approved in August 2011, has been mainstreamed and forms part of the policy

development process. The equality duties are an intrinsic part of staff responsibilities and, as such, costs could not be readily quantified.

Travel Ticket for People with Disabilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is aware of any plans by Translink to introduce a travel ticket for people with disabilities.

(AQW 3658/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that it has no plans to introduce a commercially discounted fare or any travel ticket solely for people with disabilities. My Department's Concessionary Fares Scheme offers a half fare discount to specified categories of people with disabilities and provides free travel for those who are registered blind on public transport. Under the Scheme both able bodied and disabled people can travel for free when they reach 60.

Department for Social Development

Pension Credit Branch

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff from Social Security Offices in the North West Region have applied for posts in the new Pension Credit Branch in Londonderry.

(AQW 3140/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Social Security Agency's State Pension Branch is relocating from Belfast to Londonderry. As part of that process staff across the Social Security Agency were invited to express an interest in posts which may be available as a result of the relocation.

37 staff from Social Security Agency offices in the North and West regions applied for posts through this exercise.

Pension Credit Branch

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how his Department intends to fill any staffing gaps in the new Pension Credit Branch if current staff opt not to remain in the Branch when it transfers to Londonderry; and (ii) whether staff who opt not to transfer will be offered Social Security Office positions in the Greater Belfast area.

(AQW 3141/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The human resources aspects of the re-location of the Social Security Agency's State Pension Branch to Londonderry are being managed under a business-driven Recruitment, Training and Redeployment Strategy. A key requirement of the Strategy is the need to ensure that the services provided to customers are maintained throughout the relocation exercise and that Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) policies on staff redeployment and vacancy management are complied with.

The Strategy provides that staff required for the relocated function will be identified from a range of sources, including those staff currently in post and who wish to move with their post; Departmental staff who have been identified for redeployment; and NICS staff placed on priority pools for redeployment, Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) work adjustments and Welfare transfers. In addition, in order to secure the degree of experience necessary to allow the maintenance of service levels, and to reflect the fact that this exercise is essentially about the relocation of existing posts, staff across the Department with relevant experience have been invited to express an interest in the vacancies available. Where vacancies remain after these stages, expressions of interest will be invited from staff across the wider NICS.

The redeployment of those staff who choose not to move with their current posts will be managed in accordance with the Department's Redeployment Strategy which is in line with the NICS redeployment policy and has been subject to discussion and agreement with Trade Union side (Northern Ireland

Public Service Alliance). This will include the redeployment of staff to posts elsewhere in the Social Security Agency, the wider Department for Social Development or, if necessary, the wider NICS.

Pension Credit Branch

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many staff in the Pension Credit Branch have opted (a) to relocate to the new Branch; and (b) not to relocate to the new Branch in Londonderry.

(AQW 3142/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Five members of staff have opted to move with their current posts when the Department's State Pensions Branch is relocated from Belfast to Londonderry. The remainder of the staff currently in State Pensions Branch, 125 people across 91 whole-time-equivalent posts, have decided not to relocate.

The Department's State Pension Credit Branch is already in Londonderry and staff are unaffected by the relocation exercise.

Housing Stress

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what percentage of housing applicants are in Housing Stress aged (i) up to 35; (ii) between 35-55; and (iii) over 55.

(AQW 3284/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available as the Housing Executive does not hold the information in the format requested. However, the table below gives a percentage breakdown of the Waiting List by grouped household compositions at 30 June 2011, which is the latest information available. At that date, 39,993 applicants were on the waiting list of whom 21,123 were deemed to be in housing stress.

Elderly	Large Adults Household	Large Families	Single	Small Adult Families	Small Families
9.1%	0.7%	2.5%	24.0%	2.3%	14.2%

Definition of Household Groups: -	
Elderly	1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over and one or both of whom are 60 or over
Large Adults Households	3 or more persons aged 16 or over with or without 1 persons aged 0-15 yrs
Large Families	1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over and 3 or more person aged 0-15, or 3 or more persons 16 or over and 2 or more persons aged 0-15 yrs
Single	A Person aged 16-59 years
Small Adult Families	2 Persons aged 16-59 years
Small Families	1 or 2 person aged 16 or over and 1 or 2 persons aged 0-15 years

Vacant Houses

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses are currently vacant.

(AQW 3320/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to the number of social houses currently vacant. The Housing Executive has 2,182 properties vacant as at 19 October 2011. At the 25 September

2011 there were 911 vacant Housing Association properties. These are the most up to date figures available.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an estimate of how much it would cost to extend the Winter Fuel Payment to people suffering from cancer, in each year of the current Comprehensive Spending Review period.

(AQW 3356/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no medical conditions of entitlement attached to Winter Fuel Payments currently. They are paid to persons of pension age in certain circumstances. There are two rates; £300 to households containing a person aged 80 or over and £200 to households with a person of pension age. The Department does not hold information on the number of persons suffering from cancer and not all of sufferers would be claiming a Social Security Benefit. It would therefore not be possible to cost the extension of the Winter Fuel Payment at this time.

Loughview Estate, Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new build houses have been proposed for the Loughview Estate, Holywood.

(AQW 3391/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Economic Appraisal undertaken to support the demolition of the West Green flats in the Loughview Estate, Holywood, estimated that up to 55 new units could be put back in a new scheme.

The Housing Executive are currently appointing a Housing Association to take this work forward and until they are in a position to submit a formal planning application the exact number of new homes that could be delivered will remain an estimate that is subject to planning.

Housing Executive Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff currently work for the Housing Executive.

(AQW 3392/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently employs 3,135 staff. This includes both permanent and temporary staff.

Housing Associations: Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of funding his Department has allocated to housing associations in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3393/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the funding the Department has allocated to Housing Associations including the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association (NICHA) in each of the last three years.

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£143.5m	£172.3m	£184.8m

Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost to his Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3430/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Equality Schemes require the mainstreaming of Section 75 obligations into the policy making process. The costs of implementing such schemes cannot therefore be readily disaggregated from the overall cost of my Department's work.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many females in the North Down area have (i) applied for; and (ii) received Jobseekers Allowance in each of the last 6 months.

(AQW 3455/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department does not hold information in the form requested. Information is held only on the number of successful claims to Jobseekers Allowance.

The table below shows the number of females in the North Down Westminster Parliamentary Constituency whose claims to Jobseekers Allowance started in the 6 months between 1 March 2011 and 31 August 2011 following a successful application.

Month	Mar 11	Apr 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Aug 11
New claimants	100	72	101	128	159	122

The table below shows the total number of females in the North Down Westminster Parliamentary Constituency claiming Jobseekers Allowance in each of the 6 months March 2011 to August 2011.

Date	Mar 11	Apr 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Aug 11
Female claimant count	568	567	557	579	645	683

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many males in the North Down area have (i) applied for; and (ii) received Jobseekers Allowance in each of the last 6 months.

(AQW 3456/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department does not hold information in the form requested. Information is only held on the number of successful claims to Jobseekers Allowance.

The table below shows the number of males in the North Down Westminster Parliamentary Constituency whose claims to Jobseekers Allowance started in the 6 months between 1 March 2011 and 31 August 2011 following a successful application.

Month	Mar 11	Apr 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Aug 11
New claimants	203	145	208	223	186	217

The table below shows the total number of males in the North Down Westminster Parliamentary Constituency claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in each of the 6 months March 2011 to August 2011.

Date	Mar 11	Apr 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Aug 11
Male claimant count	1,461	1,432	1,402	1,396	1,423	1,455

Mortgage Relief Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of uptake of the Mortgage Relief Scheme to date.

(AQW 3483/11-15)

Mr McCausland: From 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011 603 homeowners in mortgage difficulties have contacted the Mortgage Debt Advice Service. This help directly prevented 131 clients from becoming homeless. Appropriate debt advice and support enables people to remain in homeownership and retain financial independence during a difficult time, preventing further pressures on an already strained public purse. Anyone who may think they are in danger of losing their home, due to debt secured on it, should take immediate action and contact their lender to discuss their position and also seek independent advice, such as that offered by the Mortgage Debt Advice Service.

My Department also funds a wide range of advice networks, the Law Centre, Advice Northern Ireland and Citizens Advice Bureau, thereby helping people in debt.

Community Groups: Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total number of community groups funded by his Department.

(AQW 3484/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In 2010/11 DSD provided funding to just over 1,700 voluntary and community groups. This figure includes some 1,256 grants to groups funded through the Council led Community Support Programme, a jointly funded programme delivered by the 26 District Councils in partnership with the Department for Social Development and an additional 447 grants to groups funded directly by the Department.

Department Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3500/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Unfortunately my Department is unable to answer this question. Information is not delineated by Council Area and thus could only be provided through an extensive and time-consuming examination of both manual and computer records, which would incur disproportionate cost.

Cost of Answering Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the average cost to his Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3550/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

Incapacity Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Social Development, of the people who have migrated from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance in the last 12 months, how many have (i) been made exempt from the Work Capability Assessment; (ii) failed the Work Capability Assessment; (iii) been placed in the Work Activity Group; and (v) been placed in the Support Group.

(AQW 3557/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Approximately 76,000 Incapacity Benefit customers will have to undertake a work capability assessment over the 3 year period to March 2014. A further 9967[1] Incapacity Benefit customers, who are due to reach State Pension Age before 30 September 2014, are exempt from the reassessment process.

The other information you requested is set out in the table below:

	Number of customers
Failed the Work Capability Assessment	438[2]
Placed in the Work Related Activity Group	668[3]
Placed in the Support Group	534[3]

1. Sourced from Incapacity Benefit MIDAS scan September 2011. Please note this figure may differ from forthcoming published National Statistics.
2. Sourced from the Business Objects data as at 30 September 2011.
3. Sourced from the Jobseekers Allowance Payment System data as at 30 September 2011.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what advice his Department is providing for people in fuel poverty.

(AQW 3595/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Every person who contacts the Warm Homes Scheme free phone number 0800 9880559, whether eligible for assistance from the scheme or not, receives energy efficiency advice and is offered a Benefits Entitlement Check. This gives householders practical information about actions that can be taken to reduce energy consumption and save on fuel bills. The Benefits Entitlement Check may find that the householder is entitled a benefit which would qualify them for assistance from Warm Homes.

In addition, as part of it 2011/2012 Benefit Uptake Programme, the Social Security Agency is writing to 25,000 existing customers who may have additional benefit entitlement, to offer them a full and confidential assessment. This assessment provided by the Independent Advice Sector partner, Advice NI, will explore potential entitlement to all social security benefits.

The Agency's Outreach to Older People Campaign promotes a Freephone Benefits Advice Line. Anyone who contacts the number will receive a full benefits assessment which includes information on Warm Homes.

A province-wide advertising campaign using television, radio, press and outdoor locations, will run from mid November 2011 through to March 2012. The aim of the campaign is to encourage all older people across Northern Ireland to check if there is additional benefit to which they may be entitled.

The Social Security Agency is also working with community and voluntary sector partners in order to test new ways of reaching those harder to engage who could have additional benefit entitlement. The Agency will announce the projects to be funded through the Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake on 1 November 2011.

Boiler Replacement Scheme and Warm Homes Scheme

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development what help is available for pensioners who receive housing benefit and are therefore excluded from the Boiler Replacement Scheme and the Warm Homes Scheme.

(AQW 3698/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing Benefit is, and always has been, a qualifying benefit for the Warm Homes Scheme. A person in receipt of Housing Benefit can apply for insulation and/or heating measures from the Warm Homes Scheme.

Any private sector householder, aged 60 years or over, in receipt of Rate Relief or over 70 and in receipt of Lone Pensioner Allowance but not Housing Benefit and with an existing boiler that is 15 years old or more can apply for the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Pension Arrangements for MLAs and Ministers

Mr Campbell asked the Assembly Commission to detail any difference in the pension arrangements for MLAs and Ministers depending on their individual arrangements for how their salary is paid.

(AQW 2994/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The pension arrangements are common to all MLAs and Ministers. Pension contributions are based on a Members' total salary of £43,101 plus any office holder element, if applicable. Pension benefits accrue in accordance with a Members' number of years of service as an MLA (and office holder), the rate of personal pension contributions and a Members' salary in their final year of service.

Pension Contributions for Members

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 2698/11-15, whether pension contributions are made on behalf of every Member who is not an MP on the basis that they are earning £43,101, or more if they are an office holder, and that pension entitlements accrue accordingly.

(AQW 3136/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission makes pension contributions based on a Members' total salary (i.e. £43,101 plus any office holder element). The accrual of pension entitlements are linked to the rate of Members' pension contributions which are made at either 6% or 11.5% of a Members' actual salary each month. Supplementary contributions are deducted at the same rate(s) from any office holder salary. Members' pension entitlements accrue at either 1/50th or 1/40th (1/50th for contributions of 6% and 1/40th for contributions of 11.5%) of final Members' salary for each year of service. Final salary is defined as the Members' salary paid in the last 12 months of service. Office holder pension entitlements accrue with reference to a more complex formula but this is broadly based on the relationship of any office holder salary to the salary as a Member for each year.

MLA Salaries

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission whether the monthly salary of each MLA is paid into their own personal bank account; and whether any salary is paid into the bank account of a political party or any other third party account, and if so, how many.

(AQW 3225/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission can confirm that the salary to which each individual Member is entitled is paid into an account of his or her nomination. However, for the Assembly Commission to provide further information which would disclose the banking details of individual Members would breach the Data Protection Act 1998.

Members' Pension Funds

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission what action is being taken to ensure that Members' pension funds are invested on an ethical basis and that all companies involved have abided by the necessary ethical and human rights standards.

(AQW 3368/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Members Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) is a trust-based occupational pension scheme. Five Members are appointed by resolution of the Assembly to act as Trustees. The Trustees are responsible for administering the Pension Fund in accordance with the scheme rules, the law as it relates to pensions, tax and trust matters and regulatory guidance. The Trustees appoint an Investment Manager to invest the pension fund in accordance with the Statement of Investment Principles. The Statement of Investment Principles is a matter for the Pension Trustees.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Assembly Commission to detail the travel costs incurred by Assembly Committees and Committee staff in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3564/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The total cost of travel by Committees for the last 12 months from 1 October 2010 to 30 September 2011 is £30,460. This can be split between the cost for Members of £18,374 (shown at Table 1 below) and the cost for staff of £12,086 (shown at Table 2 below).

TABLE 1: COMMITTEE TRAVEL - MEMBERS

	Amount
Committee Members - Airfares	£5,687
Committee Members - Car Parking	£115
Committee Members - Car/Coach Hire	£2,374
Committee Members - Day Subsistence	£148
Committee Members - Mileage Taxable	£137
Committee Members - Night Subsistence (incl. hotels)	£6,969
Committee Members - Public Transport	£93
Committee Members - Reduced Mileage Over 20,000	£156
Committee Members - Taxis	£352
Committee Members - Non Tax 10,001-20,000 Miles	£351
Committee Members - Non Tax Less than 10,001 Miles	£1,992
Total	**£18,374**

TABLE 2: COMMITTEE TRAVEL - STAFF

	Amount
Committee Staff - Airfares	£4,600
Committee Staff - Car Parking	£162

	Amount
Committee Staff - Mileage Allowance	£1,959
Committee Staff - Night Subsistence (incl. hotels)	£4,711
Committee Staff - Passenger Allowance	£116
Committee Staff - Personal Allowance	£210
Committee Staff - Public Transport Costs	£38
Committee Staff - Public Transport Rate Mileage	£171
Committee Staff - Taxis	£119
Total	**£12,086**

Assembly Members' Pension Fund

Mr Campbell asked the Assembly Commission to detail the change in Investment Management Expenses for the Assembly Members Pension Fund in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3655/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Members Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) is a trust-based occupational pension scheme. Five Members are appointed by resolution of the Assembly to act as Trustees. The Trustees are responsible for administering the Pension Fund and this is not, therefore, a matter for the Assembly Commission. However, I understand that the Trustees have agreed to respond to you directly.

Education

Home-to-school Transport

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the equity of the current school transport system.

(AQO 643/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The current system, set out in Departmental Circular 1996/41 (amended September 2009), determines eligibility for assistance with school transport based on the distance that each pupil lives from a suitable school.

This distance criterion is in line with that used elsewhere (for example, in the South), and allowance is made for age through a lower qualifying distance for younger pupils. Suitable schools are those in the recognised categories of controlled, integrated, Irish medium, maintained, denominational and non-denominational grammar, which in turn reflect parental choice.

Since each pupil is assessed against the same criteria then the system is equitable.

However, following the outcome of the recent debate in the Assembly on school transport, a review of the existing policy has been initiated to determine whether it continues to be fit for purpose.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 4 November 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Child Poverty

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) what steps are being taken to fulfil the statutory obligation to end child poverty by 2020; and (ii) what targets will be included in the Programme for Government to achieve this aim.

(AQW 3003/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): In line with our statutory obligation to end child poverty by 2020, Junior Ministers have met, over the summer period, with both departmental and non-departmental members of the Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum, to discuss the departments' respective input to a Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan and seek the views of the non-departmental members on what they would like to see in the Plan.

As a result of these discussions, work is now in hand to finalise the Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan and an associated Outcomes Model to monitor progress of the Plan towards eradicating child poverty.

The Stakeholder Forum, which is chaired by Junior Ministers, met again in plenary on 27 October 2011, and received an update onthe proposed Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan and Outcomes Model.

Subject to the successful completion of this phase of the work, a draft Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan and Outcomes Model will issue for public consultation.

As with every priority issue identified, an appropriate set of performance indicators will be established as part of the new programme's monitoring and reporting framework.

Former Army Base Site in Ballykelly

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the plans for the former army base site in Ballykelly; and will they make a statement on the matter.

(AQW 3085/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer the Member to the response we made to AQW 2549/11, AQW 2856/11 and AQW 2897/11, answered in October 2011.

Flags Protocol Review Group

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the format and the timescale of the review being carried out by the Flags Protocol Review Group.

(AQW 3210/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As an attempt to address the issue of flag flying, a multiagency Joint Protocol in Relation to Flags Flown in Public Areas was introduced in 2005 as the agreed guidance for the removal of flags from public property. Although it is a best practice guide, its recommendations can be difficult to implement in every circumstance.

Consideration was given to revising the Joint Protocol; and the Flags Protocol Review Group met on two occasions. The meetings took place on

7 October and 23 November 2009. The review group does not have a set membership however participants included OFMDFM, DRD, DSD, DOE, NIO, PSNI, Equality Commission, Community Relations Council, Housing Executive, BT, NIE, Queen's University Belfast, Ballymena and Larne Borough Councils.

Work on the review was suspended in January 2010 whilst the new good relations policy was being developed. We are, however, reconvening the Flags Protocol Review Group and will take its work forward within the wider context of the development of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the easements that have been identified by their Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3265/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM identified the following current expenditure easements, totalling £1.134m, from Departmental baselines in the October 2011 Monitoring Round:

- £0.438m Commissioner for Older People;
- £0.397m Cohesion, Sharing and Integration;
- £0.126m Strategic Investment Board;
- £0.093m Maze / Long Kesh;
- £0.067m NI Judicial Appointments Commission; and
- £0.013m Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

OFMDFM has also registered an easement of £7 million from the Social Investment Fund for the 2011/12 financial year. We have obtained Executive agreement that this £7 million is carried forward into 2012/13, which would maintain the fund at £80 million, as allocated by the Executive in Budget 2011-15.

Childcare Strategy

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for an update on the £12 million earmarked for the Childcare Strategy; (ii) whether any of the £12 million has been allocated to projects in the interim; and (iii) if so, to detail the names of the projects or organisations that have received funding and the amount allocated in each case.

(AQW 3272/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Proposals from a number of departments are currently under consideration. Some of these will undoubtedly deliver substantial progress towards improving the affordability and accessibility of good quality childcare provision for all parents, and deliver key actions identified in the OFMDFM policy and economic appraisal.

We are committed to ensuring sound investment not only of the additional £3m in the current year, but of the full £12m across the term of this administration.

We plan to put proposals on the development of the Childcare Strategy to the Executive later this year.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 1792/11-15, (i) to explain the reasons for their Department not providing the information requested, given that other Departments have supplied the information for their Special Advisers and its release is in the public interest ; and (ii) how many of their Special Adviser's salaries within their Department have increased,

following the decision of the Department of Finance and Personnel on 18 July 2011 to increase the upper limit of Band B to £90,000.

(AQW 3275/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is not our policy to give specific details in relation to Special Adviser pay other than to indicate the salary band in which their salary falls.

Staff: Third Level Education Courses

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of staff in their Department who have undertaken a third level education course paid for (a) in whole; or (b) in part by their Department in each of the last three years; (ii) the (a) titles; (b) fees or costs of the courses of study undertaken; (iii) if the course was full-time or part-time; and (iv) the educational institute which provided the course.

(AQW 3394/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

Academic Year	Number of staff undertaking a third level education course	Paid (a) in whole by the Department	Paid (b) in part by the Department
2008/2009	3	1	2
2009/2010	4	3	1
2010/2011	2	2	0

WHOLLY-FUNDED COURSES.

Academic year	Course title	Course fees	full/part time	Educational Institution
2008/2009	MSc Innovation Management in the Public Sector 2 year course	£8,000 over 2 years	Part time	University of Ulster
2009/2010	CIPFA Professional Qualification Certificate level	£2,800	Part time	CIPFA (essential training)
	Postgraduate Diploma in Business Improvement 2 year course	£5,538 over 2 years	Part time	University of Ulster
	MSc Innovation Management in the Public Sector 2 year course	£8,000 over 2 years	Part time	University of Ulster

Academic year	Course title	Course fees	full/part time	Educational Institution
2010/2011	CIPFA Professional Qualification Certificate level	£2,800	Part time	CIPFA (essential training)
	CIPFA Professional Qualification Diploma level	£2,800	Part time	CIPFA (essential training)

PART-FUNDED COURSES.

Academic year	Courses paid for in part by the Department	Course fees paid by Department	full/part time	Educational Institution
2008/2009	Master of Business Administration 2 year course	£1,880 over 2 years	Part time	University of Ulster
	ACCA Certified Accounting Technician	£197.12	Part time	SE Regional College
2009/2010	Access Diploma in Computing/ Business & Multimedia 2 year course	£636 over 2 years	Part time	Belfast Metropolitan College
2010/2011	NIL			

Child Poverty

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given the Institute for Fiscal Studies forecast that child poverty is currently at 26 percent, how they intend to achieve the target of reducing child poverty to 10 percent by 2020.

(AQW 3468/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The situation has not changed since we answered AQW3003/11-15. The next Family Resources Survey child poverty figures for 2009/10are due at the end of November.

We will produce our first Annual Report in March 2012 on progress towards eradicating child poverty by 2020 as required by the Child Poverty Act 2010.

The factors creating and sustaining poverty among children are multi-faceted and long-standing. We do not propose to respond to each press report on the issue but will focus our efforts on developing and delivering a robust and strategic approach to address both contemporary financial pressures on family resources and a long term approach which will address the inter-generational obduracy of its effects.

Legislative Programme

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their legislative programme for the next 12 months.

(AQW 3490/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our answer to AQW 643/11-15 refers.

We are currently assessing our legislative requirements for this session and are working with other departmentsto finalise work on a legislative programme.

Cost of Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the cost to their Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3494/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Implementation of the Departmental Equality Scheme is mainstreamed within the department as part of the policy development process. The cost of equality duties are not maintained and cannot readily be disaggregated.

Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration they have given to designating Northern Ireland as an early intervention region to help meet the outcomes listed in the ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016.

(AQW 3518/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We fully acknowledge that many long-term social and economic benefits can be achieved through investment in early intervention and preventative practices.

Consideration of how we can most effectively maximise the outcomes in the key areas detailed in the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People through early intervention approaches will be a key consideration in the development of the next Children and Young People's Action Plan.

We have noted that the Review of Youth Justice System report, which was published on 26th September 2011 for consultation, includes a number of recommendations specifically around early intervention and prevention, in the context of the Ten Year Strategy. We are therefore keen to see the outcome of the consultation, which we and our Executive colleagues will utilise when considering this issue further.

Ministerial Subcommittee for Children and Young People

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what engagement the Ministerial Sub-committee for Children and Young People has had with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

(AQW 3519/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We very much welcome the establishment of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and believe that through this initiative, we will be able to ensure that the work of government departments in relation to children and young people links much more effectively to, and complements, that at agency and local level.

The Junior Ministers, who co-chair the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People, have met with members of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in order to identify and discuss opportunities and possibilities for collaborative and co-operative working.

Junior Ministers have also recently participated in a public seminar organised by the Regional Health and Social Care Board, QUB Improving Children's Lives and Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI), at which one of the key programme items was the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

The future delivery of the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People and the structures and processes needed to support this are currently being reviewed by Junior Ministers and will be discussed at the next meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People. This discussion will include proposals on effective strategic and operational roles and responsibilities of the Ministerial Sub-Committee and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

Junior Ministers

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of junior Ministers being the central point of accountability in children's services planning.

(AQW 3520/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The planning and delivery of children's services is a DHSSPS responsibility and the central point of accountability in children's services planning therefore lies with that Department.

Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they will introduce a statutory duty of departmental co-operation to ensure that Departments co-operate in the delivery of the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People.

(AQW 3589/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Children and young people remain a priority for us and the Executive. However, a statutory duty of departmental co-operation is not something that we are considering at present.

Departments already work well together within structures set up under the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People. We recognise that many children and young people's issues are cross-cutting and require co-operation across Executive departments and that is why we established the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People. This forum encourages co-operation across departments and assists agreement of jointly identified and emerging priorities, whilst continuing to drive forward the Ten Year Strategy.

To support the Ministerial Sub-Committee, we established 'Champions' for children and young people who act as a senior point of contact within each department and help drive forward agreed policy. Champions raise awareness at Departmental Board level to encourage departments to jointly foster children and young people's issues.

We are committed to ensuring that children and young people's issues remain high on Government's agenda and to driving this work forward.

Cost of Answering Assembly Questions

Mr Cree asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the average cost to their Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3602/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

Arm's-length Bodies

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many of the appointees in their Department's arm's-length bodies currently earn a salary of (i) £50,000 - £70,000; (ii) £70,001 - £95,000; and (iii) over £95,000.

(AQW 3727/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The number of public appointees in our Department's arms length bodies, broken down by the specified salary bands is set out in the table below.

Salary	**(i) £50,000 - £70,000**	**(ii) £70,001 - £95,000**	**(iii) Over £95,000**
Number of Public Appointees	14	2	2

Programme for Government

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will present the Programme for Government to the Executive for (i) discussion; (ii) amendment/agreement; and (iii) consultation with the wider community.

(AQW 3761/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are continuing to work on the development of the new Programme for Government. It is our intention to bring this to the Executive for further discussion very soon. It is not possible to provide definitive dates in respect of the public consultation at this time. However, we intend to initiate the process as soon as possible.

Legislative Programme for the Executive

Ms Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they intend to publish the Legislative Programme for the Executive.

(AQW 3762/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer you to our response of 29 September 2011 to your previous question on this issue – AQW 2285/11-15. This remains the position.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the rationale behind the decision to hold the majority of the public consultations on the Social Investment Fund in hotels rather than facilities that are regularly used by the community, which would provide better links to the community and which would cost less for the same standard of facilities.

(AQW 3874/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In selecting venues for the Social Investment Fund public consultation events, our officials have tried to ensure in all cases that they have a central location, are accessible to all, including people with a disability, offer the necessary communication equipment and are large enough to cater for anticipated numbers of up to 200 people.

Mindful of value for money, officials compiled an extensive list of possible venues, including some community facilities. The venues selected were those deemed most suitable based on the requirements we have outlined above.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Energy Prices

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given increasing energy prices, what discussions her Department has had with energy companies to assist farmers in making energy savings.

(AQW 3334/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): To date I have not had any discussions with energy companies. The drivers that influence energy prices, for example, the wholesale fuel price on international markets, are outside my control. DETI, as lead department on energy matters, has no direct role in the setting of energy tariffs but works with the Utility Regulator to create market conditions which operate to keep prices as low as possible.

I am aware that energy costs represent a major input cost to farming, averaging around 5% of total input costs, with varying levels across the different agriculture sectors. In the intensive sectors such as dairying, they can account for as much as 10% of total costs and previous Carbon Trust reports have indicated a spend of £36-40m per annum by the agriculture sector.

Saving energy is therefore vital. CAFRE delivers energy efficiency benchmarking and industry training and Knowledge and Technology Transfer programmes to assist farmers identify energy efficiency measures and adopt renewable energy technologies which combined can help to improve farm business competitiveness. During the last 4 years 2,500 farmers have participated in these programmes which are delivered in partnership with key stakeholders including PowerNI.

My Department also provide capital grant assistance for the installation of specific renewable energy technologies on-farm which can be further incentivised through Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs).

Financial Facilities to Assist Farmers

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions her Department has had with banks regarding the provision of financial facilities to assist farmers who wish to invest in their businesses.

(AQW 3335/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Following a series of discussions my predecessor Michelle Gildernew had with banks last year about the provision of finance to rural businesses and others in the rural community, I asked officials to engage directly again with the banks to find out what processes they employ to decide whether businesses can receive a match funding loan, and to ascertain why banks in some cases are withdrawing agreements to project promoters often after a Letter of Offer has issued. In consultation with the banks, officials have developed an outline business plan for use by applicants in support of their project proposal and this has issued to Local Action Groups for review.

This work is ongoing and should assist all rural dwellers and businesses including farmers seeking to diversify into a non-agricultural activity, particularly those not having already undertaken DARD's Diversification Challenge Programme.

Departmental Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3362/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As all my Department's costs, both direct and indirect, are not held on the basis of the question asked, it is not possible to respond without incurring disproportionate costs.

Belfast Telegraph Advertisement

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why an advert for a post in her Department in the Belfast Telegraph on 14 October 2011 appeared exclusively in Irish.

(AQW 3376/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I wish to clarify that this particular advertisement was to recruit an independent Chair of the Food Strategy Board and not for a post in my Department. I feel that it is appropriate to advertise in Irish as well as English, indeed the same advertisement also appeared in English in the Belfast Telegraph on the 14 October 2011.

Press Advertising

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many times since May 2007 her Department has placed an advert in the press where the substantive content appeared exclusively in Irish; (ii) to list the publications in which these adverts appeared; (iii) to list the jobs which were advertised; and (iv) to detail how she expects to maintain a balance in the religious background of applicants for these posts given the number of people from the Protestant community who speak the language.

(AQW 3377/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There were 2 occasions on which adverts of this nature were placed and further details are provided below:-

Publications in which the Adverts appeared	The jobs which were advertised
Gaelsceal	Vacancy on Livestock and Meat Commission Board
Belfast Telegraph Irish News Sunday Life	Vacancy for Chairperson of the Food Strategy Board

As outlined above, there have been few instances since 2007 where my Department has placed a job advert in the press where the substantive content has appeared exclusively in Irish. On those occasions the advert has also appeared in English in the main local daily papers and I am content that no one from the Protestant community has been disadvantaged in any way.

Staff: Third Level Education Courses

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of staff in her Department who have undertaken a third level education course paid for (a) in whole; or (b) in part by her Department in each of the last three years; (ii) the (a) titles; (b) fees or costs of the courses of study undertaken; (iii) if the course was full-time or part-time; and (iv) the educational institute which provided the course.

(AQW 3385/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested for business years 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 is attached as Appendix A.

AQW 3385/11-15
APPENDIX A

YEAR: 2008/2009

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	08/09	Msc Forensic Science		√	Part time	Staffordshire University	1,000.00
1	08/09	Msc European Food Regulatory Affairs		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Magee Campus	1,676.80
1	08/09	Law with Government LLB		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	868.00
1	08/09	NEBOSH Diploma in Occupational Health & Safety	√		Part time	Southern Regional College - Portadown	3,927.00
3	08/09	Post Graduate Certificate in Further & Higher Education		√	Part time	University of Ulster, Jordanstown Campus	1,728.18 (combined cost for 3 staff)
1	08/09	Msc Rural Development		√	Part time	Rural College & Derrynoid Centre - Draperstown	912.00
1	08/09	Doctorate in Business Administration		√	Part time	Edinburgh Business School	1,560.00
1	08/09	Msc Environmental Management		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Magee Campus	88.00
1	08/09	LLM Human Rights Law		√	Part time	University of Ulster, Jordanstown Campus	912.00
1	08/09	BA Hons Degree in Business Management		√	Part time	South Eastern Regional College - Bangor	506.40

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	08/09	Msc/PG Dip Organic Farming		√	Part time	Scottish Agricultural College - Aberdeen	680.00
1	08/09	Bachelor of Law (Hons)		√	Part time	Open University	1,000.00
1	08/09	Food Law LLM		√	Part time	De Montford University - Leicester	1,000.00
1	08/09	HNC Vehicle Operations & Management		√	Part time	South Eastern Regional College - Lisburn	524.00
1	08/09	Bsc Hon in Business Studies		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Magee Campus	675.20
3	08/09	HNC Civil Engineering	√		Part time	Southern Regional College - Portadown	1,209.00 (combined cost for 3 staff)
1	08/09	Msc Educational Multimedia		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	912.00
2	08/09	HNC Civil Engineering	√		Part time	Belfast Metropolitan College	1,262.00 (combined cost for 2 staff)
2	08/09	Degree link in Business Studies		√	Part time	South West College - Omagh	1376.00 (combined cost for 2 staff)
1	08/09	BA Hons Degree in Combined Studies		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	355.51
1	08/09	BTEC HNC in Construction		√	Part time	South Eastern Regional College - Lisburn	308.00
1	08/09	HNC Civil Engineering	√		Part time	North West Regional College – Londonderry	713.90

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	08/09	Msc in Communication		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	139.20
2	08/09	MSC Veterinary Epidemiology & Public Health		√	Part time	University Of London	5,885.00 (combined cost for all 2 staff)
1	08/09	MSC In Infectious Diseases	√		Part time	University Of London	1,245
1	08/09	Doctor of Education	√		Part time	Queens University Belfast	1,080.00

A total of 33 staff undertook third level education in 2008/09 at a cost of £31,543.19

YEAR: 2009/2010

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	09/10	Msc Forensic Science		√	Part time	Staffordshire University	1,000.00
1	09/10	Msc Geographical Information Systems	√		Part time	University of Ulster - Jordanstown Campus	585.00
1	09/10	BSc Hons Business Studies with Accounting		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Magee Campus	355.20
1	09/10	Certificate in Teaching followed by PGCE		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	524.44

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	09/10	MSC in Sustainable Rural Development		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	936.00
1	09/10	Degree link in Business & Related Studies		√	Part time	South West College- Enniskillen	710.40
2	09/10	LLB (Hons) Law Degree		√	Part time	University of Ulster - Magee Campus	1,456.80 (combined cost for 2 staff)
1	09/10	LLM Human Rights Law		√	Part time	University of Ulster– Jordanstown Campus	912.00
1	09/10	PGC in Further & Higher Education		√	Part time	University of Ulster– Jordanstown Campus	549.47
1	09/10	BTEC HNC in Civil Engineering		√	Part time	South West College- Omagh	64.80
1	09/10	Post Graduate in Further & Higher Education		√	Part time	University of Ulster - Magee Campus	936.00
1	09/10	Msc Geographical Information Systems		√	Part time	University of Ulster–Magee Campus	1,000.00
1	09/10	BTEC HNC in Civil Engineering		√	Part time	Southern Regional College - Portadown	326.40
1	09/10	Food Law LLM		√	Part time	De Montford University - Leicester	1,000.00
1	09/10	HNC Vehicle Operations & Management		√	Part time	South Eastern Regional College - Lisburn	200.00

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	09/10	BSC Hons Business Studies		√	Part time	University of Ulster - Magee Campus	173.60
3	09/10	HNC Civil Engineering	√		Part time	Southern Regional College - Portadown	720.00 (combined cost for 3 staff)
1	09/10	Msc Educational Multimedia		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	936.00
1	09/10	HNC Civil Engineering	√		Part time	Queens University Belfast	476.00
1	09/10	PG Certificate in Further & Higher Education	√		Part time	University of Ulster– Jordanstown Campus	666.00
1	09/10	BSC Hons Degree in Business with Accounting		√	Part time	University of Ulster - Magee Campus	710.40
1	09/10	BA Hons Degree in Combined Studies		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	362.88
1	09/10	BTEC HNC in Construction		√	Part time	South Eastern Regional College - Lisburn	180.00
1	09/10	HNC Civil Engineering	√		Part time	Belfast Metropolitan College	476.00
1	09/10	HNC Civil Engineering	√		Part time	North West Regional College - Londonderry	400.00
1	09/10	Phd Philosophy		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	936.00
1	09/10	Masters in Public Management	√		Part time	Warwick University	3,800.00

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
3	09/10	BSc Civil Engineering		√	Part time	University of Ulster– Jordanstown Campus	1,598.40 (combined cost for all 3 staff)
2	09/10	MSc in Veterinary Epidemiology & Public Health		√	Part time	University Of London	3,975.00 (combined cost for 2 staff)00
1	09/10	MSc in Innovation Management	√		Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	5,750.00

A total of 36 staff undertook third level education in 2009/10 at a cost of £31,716.79

YEAR: 2010/2011

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	10/11	Certificate in Teaching followed by PGCE		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	1,000.00
1	10/11	Msc Geographical Information Systems	√		Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	1,329.00
1	10/11	BA Hons Degree in Combined Studies		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	373.11
2	10/11	LLB (Hons) Law Degree		√	Part time	University of Ulster - Magee Campus	1,517.39 (combined cost for 2 staff)

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	10/11	Advanced Dip in Personal & Business Communication		√	Part time	CAFRE, Loughry Campus	145.60
1	10/11	Edexcel HNC in Business Studies		√	Part time	South Eastern Regional College–Bangor	401.60
1	10/11	Bsc Hons Computing & Information Systems		√	Part time	University of Ulster–Jordanstown Campus	544.80
1	10/11	BTEC HNC in Civil Engineering	√		Part time	Southern Regional College - Portadown	707.00
1	10/11	BTEC HNC in Civil Engineering	√		Part time	Belfast Metropolitan College	806.11
1	10/11	PhD Philosophy		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	960.00
1	10/11	Doctorate in Business Admin		√	Part time	Edinburgh Business School	720.00
2	10/11	Bsc Hons Business Studies		√	Part time	University of Ulster - Magee Campus	908 (combined cost for 2 staff)
1	10/11	Msc Forensic Science			Part time	Open University	1,000.00
1	10/11	PGC in Further & Higher Education		√	Part time	University of Ulster -Magee Campus	876.40
1	10/11	Bsc Hons Degree in Business with options		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	363.20
2	10/11	HNC Civil Engineering		√	Part time	Southern Regional College - Portadown	602.40 (combined cost for 2 staff)

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
1	10/11	Masters in Communication with Strategic Management for Rural Business		√	Part time	Queens University Belfast	145.60
1	10/11	Bsc Degree in Business Studies		√	Part time	Southwest College - Enniskillen	363.20
1	10/11	HND ICT		√	Part time	South Eastern Regional College– Lisburn	267.20
1	10/11	Edexcel BTEC HNC Vehicle Operations Management		√	Part time	South Eastern Regional College - Lisburn	333.60
1	10/11	Phd (Veterinary Quantitive Epidemiology)		√	Part time	University of Glasgow	1,000.00
1	10/11	BTEC HND Civil Engineering		√	Part time	Southern Regional College - Portadown	262.40
1	10/11	Masters in Public Management	√		Part time	Warwick University	3,800.00
4	10/11	BSc Civil Engineering		√	Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	2,179.20 (combined cost for all 4 staff)
14	10/11	Introduction to Teaching (3 modules of PGCE)	√		Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	8,400.00 (combined cost for all 14 staff)
2	10/11	MSc in Veterinary Epidemiology & Public Health		√	Part time	University Of London	210.00 (combined cost for 2 staff)
1	10/11	Doctorate in Education	√		Part time	Queens University Belfast	1,150.00

Number of staff	Year	Titles	Paid for in whole by the Department	Paid for in part by the Department	Part time/Full time Course	Educational Institute which provided the Course	Fees/costs to DARD (£)
2	10/11	NEBOSH Diploma in Occupational Health & Safety	√		Part time	Southern Regional College - Portadown	7,900.00 (combined cost for 2 staff)
1	10/11	MSc in Innovation Management	√		Part time	University of Ulster – Jordanstown Campus	4,000.00

A total of 50 staff undertook third level education in 2010/11 at a cost of £42,265.81

Ban on Animals in Circuses

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she intends to introduce a ban on animals in circuses; and if so, when.

(AQW 3450/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My priorities on animal welfare over the coming period will continue to 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, permitted procedures and the tail docking of dogs. Engaging with Councils as they prepare for their new animal welfare enforcement role in relation to non-farmed animals is also a key priority. The majority of the provisions of the Act were commenced from 11 July this year and the remainder of the provisions will be introduced in April 2012, as new subordinate legislation is made and enforcement powers are given to Councils.

At this time, I have no plans to introduce a ban on animals in circuses. I can assure you that I intend to take the time to assess the available evidence and give the issue detailed consideration. I will also take advice on the legal implications and on the proportionality of the options open to me for example, a ban or the introduction of a robust regulatory system so that the welfare of animals in circuses is fully protected.

I would also want to examine developments in the south of Ireland and Britain and engage with stakeholders, including circus operators and their representatives, to ensure that their views are properly considered. In addition, I would wish to take into account developments in Europe, particularly in relation to the proposed new EU Animal Welfare Strategy for 2011-2015 and any legal challenges to an all-out ban on wild animals in circuses in other European countries.

While we have no circuses based in the north, there are a number of circuses registered in the south, some of which regularly travel here. My Department has an agreed protocol with colleagues in the south which provides for an inspection of animals from these registered circuses before moving back to the south.

Departmental Legislative Programme

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's legislative programme for the next twelve months.

(AQW 3457/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Proposals are being developed to regulate reservoir safety, and I intend to introduce a Bill to the Assembly in 2013. Prior to that, a public consultation on the policy proposals will be undertaken in early 2012.

In addition my Department plans to introduce a range of subordinate legislation relating to the Forestry Act (NI) 2010, the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 and the Dogs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2011.

Proposals are also being developed for Statutory Rules relating to the Loughs Agency and to tuition fees for students undertaking Higher Education courses at CAFRE; and to transpose various EU Directives and Regulations relating to the work of my Department including agri-environment schemes, animal and plant health, animal welfare, plant protection products, marketing of agricultural produce and products, fisheries and aquaculture, Review of Decisions and Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowance.

Proposals are also being developed jointly with the DOE for the Nitrates Action Programme.

Rural Proofing: Legislation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to introduce legislation to enforce rural proofing.

(AQW 3460/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Reinvigorated rural proofing was a commitment under the 2007 – 2011 Programme for Government. It included the revision of guidance on rural proofing, the development of a rural proofing training programme for delivery to NICS policy makers and provision of an advice and support service for rural proofing. A review of the impact of the reinvigorated rural proofing process will be carried out in 2012. The outcomes of this review will inform the need, if any, to legislate for rural proofing.

Rural Support Networks

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what guidelines her Department has given to Local Action Groups in order for them to work collaboratively with the Rural Support Networks.

(AQW 3461/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All Local Action Groups (LAGs) have been advised in writing and at various events about the formal support that has been provided by the Rural Support Networks (RSNs) since September 2010. However prior to this, the RSNs have had close links with the LAGs,with RSN members represented on most LAGs and these links have been in place since the beginning of the NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP). The Rural Development Consortium (comprising of the RCN, 9 Rural Support Networks and the NI Rural Women's Network) currently has a contract with my Department until 31 March 2012. A key focus of this contract is about ensuring that rural community needs are effectively addressed through the Axis 3 'Quality of Life' measures. A number of 'Key Performance Indicators' have been directly linked to each of the LAGs' strategies, with clear outputs expected.

Flooding: Compensation to Farmers

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's position on providing compensation to farmers who lose crops as a result of flood damage.

(AQW 3473/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I sympathise with those farmers who may have lost crops as a result of flood damage or other weather events and acts of nature. The Executive faces very significant financial pressures in the present economic climate and there are no financial support measures available to farmers for losses due to severe weather, including flooding. Any potential for compensation funding is severely constrained by business case requirements and compliance with restrictive EU State Aid Rules.

Farm incomes fluctuate from year to year for a range of reasons including changes in supply and demand,the costs of production and weather events, and it is therefore important that farmers act to mitigate potential risks impacting on their businesses as far as possible. In respect of risks associated with flooding, farmers are encouraged to consider appropriate measures such as precautionary activity around best practice and investment. In addition, farmers should consider the need for private insurance provision.

My Department has provided, and will continue to provide, practical information and advice to help mitigate risks associated with severe weather. In addition, my Department has commissioned research into additional measures that farmers can take to mitigate risk associated with extreme weather events and the findings of this research will be disseminated to farmers through CAFRE when they become available.

Cost of Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3502/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Implementation of the Departmental Equality Scheme is mainstreamed within the Department as part of the policy development process. The cost of equality duties are not maintained and cannot readily be disaggregated.

Schools Milk Scheme: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many schools in the North Down area offer the Schools Milk Scheme.

(AQW 3543/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The most recent data available is for the summer 2011 term when 13 schools in the North Down parliamentary constituency area offered the EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme.

Brucellosis Control Order (Northern Ireland) 2004: BT40 Notices

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many successful cases have been taken against farmers who contravened a BT40 notice under the Brucellosis Control Order (NI) 2004 by allowing contact with animals on adjoining land in each of the last three years; and how many cases are currently pending.

(AQW 3571/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

Convictions	Breached BT40 by allowing contact with animals on adjoining land
25/10/2008-24/10/2009	0
25/10/2009-24/10/2010	0
25/10/2010-24/10/2011	0

Cases pending	Breached BT40 by allowing contact with animals on adjoining land
25/10/2008-24/10/2009	0
25/10/2009-24/10/2010	1

Cases pending	Breached BT40 by allowing contact with animals on adjoining land
25/10/2010-24/10/2011	0

Forestry Grant Scheme: East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm owners in East Londonderry have (i) applied for; and (ii) received funding under a Forestry Grant Scheme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3573/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the last three years, 21 new applicants applied to plant trees in this constituency and all received approval. Over the same period, 33 people received payments for planting trees.A yearly breakdown is shown in the table below. The table shows that more people received funding in some years compared with applications approved in that year. This is because an approved application is valid for two years after the date of approval.

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Applications	1	10	10
Received Funding	13	7	13

In addition, there are approximately 70 people who received an annual farm woodland premium payment over this three year period.

Departmental Legislative Programme

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what legislation she intends to introduce over the next four years.

(AQW 3587/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Proposals are being developed to regulate reservoir safety, and I intend to introduce a Bill to the Assembly in 2013. Prior to that, a public consultation on the policy proposals will be undertaken in early 2012.

In addition my Department plans to introduce a range of subordinate legislation relating to the Forestry Act (NI) 2010, the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 and the Dogs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2011.

Proposals are also being developed for Statutory Rules relating to the Loughs Agency and to tuition fees for students undertaking Higher Education courses at CAFRE; and to transpose various EU Directives and Regulations relating to the work of my Department including agri-environment schemes, animal and plant health, animal welfare, plant protection products, marketing of agricultural produce and products, fisheries and aquaculture, cross compliance, Review of Decisions, Single Farm Payment and Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowance.

Proposals are also being developed jointly with the DOE for the Nitrates Action Programme.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3603/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister since taking up post on 16 May 2011; and (ii) departmental officials in the period for the last 12 months are shown below: -

The Minister	Departmental Officials
£1,555	£3,140,936

Milk Production

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the annual milk production in each of he last three years; and (ii) what action is being taken to help farmers receive maximum financial return for the product.

(AQW 3609/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: (i) My Department collects information on the amount of raw milk collected from farms. The annual milk production in the last three years was:

	2008	2009	2010
Mill production (million litres)	1,903	1,772	1,849

(ii)To maximise the financial return from milk production, I believe it is vital that the dairy industry follows a market-led strategy. In practice, this means that decisions on milk production should be taken by milk producers in the context of their input costs, market requirements and market returns (i.e. the milk price achievable). Therefore, to help farmers achieve better financial returns, my Department (through CAFRE and AFBI) funds education, training, technical support and research to help improve efficiency and competitiveness. In particular, good animal husbandry and grassland management skills will continue to be the solid foundation of any dairy farm and these must be updated to take account of best practice, new technologies and other developments.

To help improve returns, financial assistance is available to the dairy sector under the Regional Food Programme and Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme. It also benefits indirectly from aid which continues to be provided under the EU School Milk scheme and from promotional aid granted by the EU to the Dairy Council. In addition, a range of financial and non-financial support measures are available to dairy processing companies from INI to help them remain competitive.

European Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how much her Department has received from Europe for grants in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3610/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As an accredited Paying Agency, the Department authorises and executes payments under the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (2007-2013) (EAFRD). In addition, DARD administers EU funding allocated to rural areas under the Structural Funds and European Fisheries Fund.

The following amounts were received by the Department from the EU in relation to these schemes:

	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF)	256,386,998	297,017,341	269,979,141

	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and EU Structural Funds	31,448,432	33,985,397	34,949,456
Total	**287,835,430**	**331,002,738**	**304,928,597**

These funds are paid directly by the Department to grant claimants.

Flooding in the West Tyrone Constituency

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what (i) precautions and (ii) cross-departmental initiatives her Department has taken (i) in preparation for; and (ii) after instances of flooding in the West Tyrone constituency.

(AQW 3967/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

Preparation and post-flood actions

During the recent Flooding Event when forecasts of heavy rain were predicted my Rivers Agency staff were proactive in preparing for flood response. This included monitoring of river levels, cleaning inlet grills to culverts regularly to ensure they were free from blockage, ensuring communication links with co-respondents were in place and also filling additional sandbags and deploying these and pumping equipment to threatened properties. After all flooding events, Rivers Agency carries out investigations to establish the cause of the flooding and where it is a result of rivers, the Agency conducts pre-feasibility studies to establish if a cost beneficial solution to the problem to prevent reoccurrence is possible.

Cross-departmental initiatives

The Agency chairs 3 Flood Liaison Groups. A HQ Group and 2 Regional groups which include representatives from NI Fire and Rescue Service, Roads Service and NIWater. A representative from the Flooding Incident Line also attends the HQ Flood Liaison Group.Recently Emergency Planning Coordinating Officers (EPCO) from local councils have been invited on to the HQ Group. In the West, which encompasses West Tyrone, the Western EPCO attends this group. The remit of the groups is to improve co-ordination and co-operation between the different agencies and to assist each other where possible during an event. The HQ Flood Liaison Group is overseen by the Flood Strategy Steering Group. It is chaired by the Chief Executive of Rivers Agency and its remit is to ensure improvements in preparation and response to flooding events.

Ashton Park, Finaghy: Undesignated Watercourse

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Rivers Agency's consultation on the undesignated watercourse in the Ashton Park area of Finaghy.

(AQW 3983/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Ashton Park, Finaghy (Belfast) is affected by an underground, culverted drainage system that is not designated for maintenance by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (NI) under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973. Riparian landowners, through whose land the watercourse runs, are responsible for maintenance.

There is a history of flooding problems in the vicinity of AshtonPark mainly relating to roads and garden flooding. Rivers Agency engaged Consultant Engineers to conduct investigations and ascertain the cause of the flooding experienced by residents. Obstructions and the poor structural condition of the drainage system havedelayedthe survey work however the Consultant Engineers concerned are due to report their findings shortly.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Líofa 2015

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 2249/11-15, to outline the barriers and preconceptions which have surrounded the Irish Language that she hopes the Líofa campaign will address.

(AQW 3401/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am aware that there are differing viewpoints in relation to the Irish language across the North. I am keen to broaden the appeal of Irish and ensure that it is seen as part of our shared cultural heritage. The opportunity to learn the language is open to everyone.

Líofa 2015

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 2251/11-15, in the absence of any analysis being carried out, how she (i) identified; and (ii) hopes to address the view that some people have sought to portray the promotion of Gaelic culture and the Irish language as the preserve of one section of our community.

(AQW 3403/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware that there are differing viewpoints in relation to the Irish language across the North. I am keen to broaden the appeal of Irish and ensure that it is seen as part of our shared cultural heritage. The opportunity to learn the language is open to everyone.

I hope that the Líofa campaign and future Irish language initiatives will illustrate the benefits and opportunities that learning the Irish language can bring to everyone in our society.

Gaeilge and Gáidhlig Speakers: Links

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will explore how links can be built between Gaeilge speakers here and Gáidhlig speakers in Scotland, particularly in the Western Isles.

(AQW 3436/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Through the Colmcille Programme, Foras na Gaeilge and Bord na Gáidhlig are involved in promoting links between Irish and Scottish Gaelic communities and speakers.

Examples of projects funded through the Colmcille Programme are attached.

An evaluation of the impact of the programme which is funded by DCAL, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Scottish Government will be completed by the end of October. Officials will use the evaluation to consider the future direction and scope of the programme.

Colmcille projects between Northwest and Scotland	Further information about the projects	Location of Organisations	Date of Projects
Youth Exchange organised by The Ulster branch of Ógras.	Music Exchange between Young people in Glasgow Gaelic School and An Crann Óg. Ógras is an Irish Gaelic youth group and An Crann Óg are an Irish Gaelic traditional music group for young people aged between 8-23.	The Ulster branch of Ógrasisbasedin Gaoth Dobhair.	9 September - 2 October 2011.
School Exchange organised by Pobal Scoil Ghaoth Dobhair (Gaoth Dobhair Community School)	School exchange between Gaoth Dobhair Community School and the Scottish Gaelic units in Inverness Royal Academy and Dingwall Academy in Scotland.	Gaoth Dobhair Community School is located in Gaoth Dobhair.	May 2012.
Highlands in Harmony organised by Ceoltóirí Chloich Cheann Fhaola (The Cloughaneely Musicians).	Music Exchange between The Cloch Cheann Fhaola Musicians and the Scottish Gaelic classes in Culloden Academy, Culloden, Scotland. This project is part of an ongoing collaboration and exchange between Culloden Academy and The Cloughaneely Musicians.	The Cloch Cheann Fhaola Musicians are based in Gortahork.	27 June – 4 July 2011.
Music and Cultural Exchangeto start Slí Cholmcillebetween An Crann Óg, The Lochaber Musicians and Glasgow Gaelic League Choir organised by AnChrann Óg and The Lochaber Musicians.	The Lochaber musicians are a young group of Scottish Gaelic speaking musicians based in Fort William. The Gaelic League Choir in Glasgow consists of Irish and Scottish Gaelic singers.	An Crann Óg are based in Gaoth Dobhair.	February - March 2012

List of Events linking Northern Ireland and Scotland 2011

Organisation: Foras na Gaeilge & Bòrd na Gàidhlig through Colmcille:
Event: Slí Cholmcille ~ St Columba Trail
Date -ongoing

A web site and Heritage and tourism trail to be launched November 2011 linking Gleann Cholmcille, Derry, Limavady, Cille Mhàrtain, Earra-Ghàidheal & Steòrnabhagh Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

Organisation: Lecale Gaelic Society
Month: February 2011

Visit from families from North Lanark who are involved in Gaelic-medium education for youth events programme

Cumann Gaelach Ghlór na Móna
Event: Intercultural Youth Progamme
Month: February 2008

Visit by students and former students from Coláiste Feirste to Gaelic youth groups and students in Inverness and Skye as part of youth leadership training programme.

Organisation: Irish Pages
Event: Readings and arts events Glasgow 2011
Months: March - June

Literary events in community arts venues based on the Irish language edition of Irish Pages 2011.

Organisation: Armagh Pipers
Event: Link with Fèis an Earraich, Isle of Skye
Month: April 2011

Participation by young musicians and learners in week of events organised by Gaelic-medium programme for music training organised by Fèis an Eilein in the Isle of Skye.

Amra Choluim Chille
Month June 2011

Showing of the exhibition Amra Choluim Chille which links Ireland and Scotland in the Roe Valley Arts and Heritage Centre, Limavady.

Ógras an Chaistil –
Droichead na Maoile
Month: June – July 2011

Project linking young people involved in Gaelic-medium education in Ballycastle and Islay, who are relatively isolated from other Gaelic-medium groups

Organisation: Cumann Mhic Reachtain
Event: Scoil Samhraidh Mhic Reachtain ~ McCracken Summer School
Month: July 2011

Programme of events including Scottish Gaelic classes and conversation circle and Scottish Gaelic song, and linking with Gaelic and Irish language organisations in Glasgow.

Cearcall na Gàidhlig Lannraig a Tuath
Event: Link with North Lanark
Month: August 2011

Visit by families from Northern Ireland involved in Irish-medium education to a summer course in North Lanark.

Organisation: Gael-Linn & Comunn na Gàidhlig
Event: Ri Chèile
Date: September 2011

Link between Irish-speaking pupils in schools in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland participating in debating and public speaking competitions.

Organisation: Comhairle Dhún Geanainn
Event: Gael-Trail
Month: Deireadh Fómhair 2011

Link between Irish language and community groups, and Dungannon and Cookstown District Councils and Argyll & Bute Council.

Organisation: Ariel Killick (Stát neamhspleách Sonais)
Month: October - December
Event: Study visits & seed funding for Circus Theatre project.

Organisation: Pobal
Event: Fócas
Month: 17 Samhain 2011

Conference on language planning and legislation.

William Kennedy International Piping Festival (Armagh Pipers Club)
Event: Lá na Meánscoileanna
Month: November 2011

Day of events for Irish-medium secondary schools and A-level pupils including Scottish Gaelic classes and song workshops.

Staff: Third Level Education Courses

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of staff in her Department who have undertaken a third level education course paid for (a) in whole; or (b) in part by her Department in each of the last three years; (ii) the (a) titles; (b) fees or costs of the courses of study undertaken; (iii) if the course was full-time or part-time; and (iv) the educational institute which provided the course.

(AQW 3553/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In complying with the NICS Essential Qualifications (EQ) and Assistance to Study (ATS), DCAL has supported a number of staff who have undertaken part-time courses of study in each of the last three years, as summarised in the table attached.

THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION - SUMMARY DETAILS 2008/2009 - 2011/2012

	2008/2009		2009/2010		2010/2011		2011/2012		TOTALS	
Financial Support	**Number of Staff (08/09)**	**08/09 Costs**	**Number of Staff (09/10)**	**09/10 Costs**	**Number of Staff (10/11)**	**10/11 Costs**	**Number of Staff (11/12)**	**YTD '11/12 Cost**	**Total Staff Numbers**	**Total Costs**
EQ - 100%	3	4,543.38	6	13,095.00	7	17,355.00	1	1,508.00	17	**36,501.38**
ATS - 80%	6	4,046.36	6	2,508.42	9	4,074.73	4	1,063.92	25	**11,693.43**
Totals	**9**	**8,589.74**	**12**	**15,603.42**	**16**	**21,429.74**	**5**	**3,385.52**	**42**	**48,194.81**

Further details of the Essential Qualifications and Assistance to Study schemes can be found by clicking on the following link - http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/publication-scheme-hr-policies

A detailed breakdown in answer to your question can be found at Annex A.

ANNEX A

Question	(i)	(i) a&b	(iii)	(ii) a	(iv)	(ii) b
Financial Year	**No of Staff**	**Source**	**Part-Time**	**Course/ Description**	**Place of Study**	**Total**
08/09	1	ATS - 80%	Evening Classes	BA Degree Arts Culture & Society - QUB (1st Year)	Queens University Belfast	672.00
	1			ACCA - Stage 2	Belfast Metropolitan College	823.20
	1			CIMA - Revision Course BPP Dublin	Belfast Metropolitan College	708.64
	1			Countryside & Fisheries Management	North West Regional College	495.60
	1			IATI	CIPFA Offices, Belfast	945.60
	1			IATI - Year 2	Belfast Metropolitan College	401.32
	6	**ATS Total**				**4,046.36**
	1	EQ - 100%	Distance Learning	2nd Year Tuition Fees	Aberystwyth University	1,770.00
	1			2nd year Tuition Fees Msc Econ Archive Administration	Aberystwyth University	1,710.00
	1			IIA Advanced Diploma in Internal Auditing & Management - Case Study Revision Workshop	E-Learning	1,063.38
	3	**Essential Qualifications Total**				**4,543.38**
2008/2009 TOTAL			**9 STAFF**			**8,589.74**

Question	(i)	(i) a&b	(iii)	(ii) a	(iv)	(ii) b
Financial Year	**No of Staff**	**Source**	**Type**	**Course/ Description**	**Place of Study**	**Total**
09/10	1	ATS	Distance Learning	CIMA	Richard Clarke Academy	701.22
	1		Evening Classes	Bsc Hons in Business Studies	University of Ulster, Jordanstown	532.80
	1			BA Degree Arts Culture & Society - QUB (2nd Year)	Queens University Belfast	688.00
	1			ACCA	Belfast Metropolitan College	249.60
	1			ILEX Diploma in Paralegal Studies	SE Regional College, Bangor	136.80
	1			IATI	CIPFA Offices, Belfast	200.00
	6	**ATS Total**				**2,508.42**
	1	EQ	Distance Learning	Msc Econ Archive Administration (3rd Year)	Aberystwyth University	1,770.00
	4			Post Grad course in Records Management and Archive Administration (1st year)	Aberystwyth University	10,680.00
	1		Evening Classes	Diploma in Marketing, Advertising and PR	Queens University Belfast	645.00
	6	**Essential Qualifications Total**				**13,095.00**
2009/2010 TOTAL			**12 STAFF**			**15,603.42**

Question	(i)	(i) a&b	(iii)	(ii) a	(iv)	(ii) b
Financial Year	**No of Staff**	**Source**	**Type**	**Course/ Description**	**Place of Study**	**Total**
10/11	1	ATS - 80%	Distance Learning	Irish Language Course	E-Learning	127.08
	1		Evening Classes	Bsc Hons in Business Studies	University of Ulster, Jordanstown	367.20
	1			CIPD Level 3 Cert in Training Practice	Belfast Metropolitan College	384.00
	1			BA Degree Arts Culture & Society - QUB (3rd Year)	Queens University Belfast	779.00
	1			ACCA - Stage 2 Exam Fees	BIFHE	110.40
	1			CIMA - E3 Enterprise Strategy; Final Papers & Practical Assessment	BPP House, Dublin	904.65
	1			IATI - June Exam Fees	CIPFA	92.00
	1			CIMA	Belfast Metropolitan College	584.00
	1			BSc Hons in Business Studies - Semester 1&2	University of Ulster, Jordanstown	726.40
	9	**ATS Total**				**4,074.73**

Question	(i)	(i) a&b	(iii)	(ii) a	(iv)	(ii) b
Financial Year	**No of Staff**	**Source**	**Type**	**Course/ Description**	**Place of Study**	**Total**
10/11	1	EQ - 100%	Distance Learning	MSC ECON in Records Management (3rd Year Tuition Fees)	Aberystwyth University	1,800.00
	1			PIIA Tuition Programme (PWC)	E-Learning	4,421.00
	4			2ND Year tuition fees Post Grad course at Aberystwyth in Records Management and Archive Administration	Aberystwyth University	9,600.00
	1			Post Grad Diploma in Information Rights Law & Practice	Northumbria University	1,534.00
	7	**Essential Qualifications Total**				**17,355.00**
2010/2011 TOTAL			**16 STAFF**			**21,429.73**

Question	(i)	(i) a&b	(iii)	(ii) a	(iv)	(ii) b
Financial Year	**No of Staff**	**Source**	**Type**	**Course/ Description**	**Place of Study**	**Total**
11/12	1	ATS - 80%	Evening Classes	IATI - Level 5 Diploma	Belfast Metropolitan College	123.92
	1			CIPD Level 3 Diploma in L&D Practice (with exemptions)	Belfast Metropolitan College	160.00
	1			ACCA - Stage 3	Richard Clarke Academy	407.20
	1			BSc Hons in Business Studies - Year 2 Fees	University of Ulster, Jordanstown	372.80
	4	ATS Total				1,063.92

Question	(i)	(i) a&b	(iii)	(ii) a	(iv)	(ii) b
Financial Year	**No of Staff**	**Source**	**Type**	**Course/ Description**	**Place of Study**	**Total**
11/12	1	EQ - 100%	Distance Learning	PIIA P3 & P4 Fess including Revision Workshop	E-Learning	1,508.00
	1	**Essential Qualifications Total**				**1,508.00**
2011/2012 TOTAL			**5 STAFF**			**2,571.92**
GRAND TOTAL			**42 STAFF**			**48,194.81**

ATS - ASSISTANCE TO STUDY: 80% FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE - £1K CAP PER ACADEMIC YEAR

EQ - ESSENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS - 100% FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3604/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since taking up office on 16 May 2011, I have incurred travel costs of £1,229.

In the last 12 months, officials of the Department incurred travel costs of £210,428.

Centenary of the Birth of Myles na gCopaleen

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Myles na gCopaleen.

(AQW 3627/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: To mark the centenary of the birth of Myles na gCopaleen, Libraries NI and a range of partner organisations were involved in compiling a programme of talks, discussions and performances designed to explore his life and work.

Some of the events have already taken place, but there are more in the coming months. Further programming information has been published by The Alley Arts and Conference Centre in Strabane.

Gilford Library

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the statement from the Board of Libraries NI on 20 October 2011, what specific library facilities will be available to the people of Gilford from March 2012.

(AQW 3686/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: This matter is operationally the responsibility of Libraries NI.

Libraries NI have informed me that it will work in partnership with Banbridge District Council and the Gilford Community Development Group to provide library services from the new Community Centre.

The exact nature of the provision is subject to discussions between Libraries NI, the Community and the Council. An initial meeting to discuss specific library facilities took place on 25 October 2011.

Library Opening Hours: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the opening hours of each library in North Down in each of the last four years.

(AQW 3706/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has provided me with information regarding the opening hours of each library in the North Down Constituency for each of the last four years. Please see Annex A.

ANNEX A

Opening Hours Current							
Branch	**Total Hours**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Bangor Carnegie Library	65	9.00-9.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-10.00	9.00-5.00	9.00-5.00
Donaghadee Library	40	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-4.00	10.00-4.00
Holywood Library	53.5	9.30-8.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	10.00-5.00

Summer Opening Hours July and August 2011							
Branch	**Total (P/W)**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Bangor Carnegie Library	54	9.00-8.00	9.00-5.00	9.00-5.00	9.00-8.00	9.00-5.00	9.00-5.00
Donaghadee Library	37	1.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-4.00	10.00-4.00
Holywood Library	47.5	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	10.00-5.00

Opening Hours 2010/11							
Branch	**Total (P/W)**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Bangor Carnegie Library	65	9.00-9.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-10.00	9.00-5.00	9.00-5.00
Donaghadee Library	40	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-4.00	10.00-4.00
Holywood Library	53.5	9.30-8.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	10.00-5.00

Opening Hours 2009/10							
Branch	**Total (P/W)**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Bangor Carnegie Library	65	9.00-9.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-10.00	9.00-5.00	9.00-5.00

Opening Hours 2009/10							
Branch	**Total (P/W)**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Donaghadee Library	40	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-4.00	10.00-4.00
Holywood Library	53.5	9.30-8.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	10.00-5.00

Opening Hours 2008/09							
Branch	**Total (P/W)**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Bangor Carnegie Library	65*	9.00-9.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-10.00	9.00-5.00	9.00-5.00
Donaghadee Library	40	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-4.00	10.00-4.00
Holywood Library	53.5	9.30-8.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	10.00-5.00

Opening Hours 2007/08							
Branch	**Total (P/W)**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Bangor Carnegie Library	58**	9.00-5.30	9.00-5.30	9.00-5.00	9.00-10.00	9.00-9.00	9.00-5.30
Donaghadee Library	40	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	1.00-8.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-4.00	10.00-4.00
Holywood Library	53.5	9.30-8.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	10.00-5.00

* Refurbished Carnegie Library opened 28 November 2008 with new opening hours.

** Bangor Carnegie Library Refurbishment – temporary library sited in Flagship Centre opening hours increased from 45 to 58 to reflect Flagship opening hours (except Sunday opening).

World Police and Fire Games 2013

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 2767/11-15, how the application process for 'expressions of interest' for the 2013 World Police and Fire Games was advertised; and which governing bodies were approached.

(AQW 3784/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Between 2and 29 July 2010 Sport NI placed an advertisement in the Belfast Telegraph on behalf of the Stakeholder Group (the lead body for the 2013 Games in advance of the establishment of the 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited in February 2011) seeking expressions of interest from venue owners, sporting and related organisations wishing to host events during the World Police and Fire Games in Belfast in 2013.

The advertisement was also placed on the Sport NI website and letters regarding the expression of interest exercise issued to the Chief Executive of each District Council and to the recognised governing bodies whose sport were expected to be part of the 2013 Games, as detailed.

- Cycling Ulster
- NI Pool Association
- Ulster Branch Triathlon Ireland
- Basketball NI
- Swim Ulster
- NI Volleyball
- NI Archery Society
- Tennis Ulster Branch Tennis Ireland
- Ulster Squash
- Ulster Hockey
- Ulster Rugby
- Ulster Angling Federation (freshwater)
- Canoe Association of NI
- Golf Union of Ireland
- Rowing Ireland
- Irish Bowling Association
- Irish table tennis (Ulster Branch)
- NI Ten Pin Bowling
- Softball Ulster
- Ulster Badminton
- Ulster Clay Pigeon Association
- NI Athletics
- NI Smallbore Shooting Union
- NI Judo Federation
- Boxing - AIBA (Ulster)
- NI Wrestling Association Ltd
- Irish Dragon Boat Association
- Royal Yachting Association
- Waterskiing NI
- Irish Football Association
- Irish American Football Association
- Irish Surfing Association
- Ulster Rifle Association
- Gaelic Athletic Association (Ulster Council)
- Cricket Ireland

Strangford Lough: Promotion of Sporting Activities

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action is being taken by her Department to promote sporting activities on Strangford Lough.

(AQW 3786/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of funding. In the last two financial years, Sport NI has provided £267,369 to projects that will enhance and promote sporting activities on Strangford Lough. Details of these projects are set out in the table below:

Year	Organisation	Project	Amount
2009/10	Strangford Lough Yacht Club	New boats, boarding and ancillary equipment	£199,544
2010/11	East Down Yacht Club	New boats	£28,331
2010/11	Quoile Yacht Club	New dinghies	£9,700
2010/11	National Trust	Bikes for new trails at Castleward	£12,627
2010/11	Comber Explorer Scouts	Canoes, Kayaks and safety equipment	£17,167

Furthermore, Sport NI is working with the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership, local councils and the Canoe Association of NI to develop a major canoeing event to be held on the Lough in June 2012.

Strangford Constituency: Sharing of Sports Facilities

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to promote the sharing of sports facilities between local councils and the Department of Education in the Strangford constituency.

(AQW 3788/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for promoting the sharing of sports facilities between local councils and the Department of Education (DE) in the Strangford constituency is a matter for the councils concerned and the individual school management authorities.

The embedding of a strategic and co-ordinated approach to the provision of education and district council sports facilities throughout the north of Ireland, including in the Strangford constituency, is identified as one of a number of 'Key Steps to Success' under my published sports strategy, Sport Matters. This step has recently been incorporated into a detailed Sport Matters Action Plan which has been agreed by local councils, including those in the Strangford constituency, and DE.

As part of this Action Plan, Sport NI, with DE support, is also developing an advocacy document which is designed to promote shared use of school sports facilities in all areas and all constituencies in the north of Ireland. My Sport Matters Monitoring Group (SMMG), which I chair, has recently agreed that local councils, including those in the Strangford constituency, should be consulted on the document's development prior to its wider publication and circulation.

Ulster Museum: Post-project Evaluation

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has received the final Post Project Evaluation on the Ulster Museum from National Museums Northern Ireland; and whether any recommendations were made as a result of this evaluation.

(AQW 3790/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: While my predecessor did meet with Departmental and National Museums officials in April to discuss a late draft of the Ulster Museum Post Project Evaluation, I have not personally seen the report. I can however confirm that the final version of the Post Project Evaluation was received by my Department in May 2011 and has since been submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The Post Project Evaluation includes a number of lessons learned from the redevelopment of the Ulster Museum upon which recommendations have been made. These lessons and recommendations fall under three categories, specifically strategic lessons, project management lessons and operational lessons.

It is the intention of National Museums to build on the expertise developed and capitalise on the learning, from both the project, and its Post Project Evaluation. Consequently the Post Project Evaluation will be disseminated at all levels of National Museums from the Board of Trustees through to individual project managers.

Many of the lessons learned equate to best practice in project management and the Post Project Evaluation will be used as a template to inform all forthcoming major capital projects. National Museums will use the Ulster Museum Post Project Evaluation as a case study and it will be incorporated into all training programmes for Senior Responsible Owners, Project Boards and Project Managers.

Lurgan Library

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, when considering the banding of Lurgan Library, whether Libraries NI took into account the fact that the main entrance to the library was closed for three months and that this affected the footfall of the library; and whether, in light of this information, Libraries NI would consider a different banding for Lurgan Library.

(AQW 3807/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI have informed me that they were aware that the main entrance to Lurgan Library was out of action for 13 weeks and that this was taken into account when considering the banding for the Library.

The usage figures that form the basis of the Opening Hours Review for Lurgan Library do relate to a full year.

Visitor figures for Libraries across the North of Ireland are produced using what is known as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) methodology.

Every year, CIPFA produces and publishes library visitor figures for all libraries across the North.

GAA: Alleged Sectarianism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether she has initiated any reviews or investigations into alleged sectarianism within the Gaelic Athletic Association and if not, would she consider so doing; and (ii) whether her Department would continue to fund the GAA if it were found to be sectarian.

(AQW 3817/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The initiation and consideration of reviews into alleged sectarianism within any cultural or sporting association in the north of Ireland, including the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), is not a matter for me but entirely a matter for the organisation concerned. I am, however, aware that the GAA's constitution and rules expressly declare the Association to be anti-sectarian rather than sectarian. I understand that this constitution also sets out specific penalties against any GAA member or supporter who infringes the GAA's anti-sectarian rules including a minimum of 8 weeks suspension and potential fines, disqualifications, debarment and expulsion from the Association.

Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport including setting conditions under which funding will be provided. As part of its funding conditions, SNI operates an equality scheme which requires all recipients of funding, including the GAA, to operate an equal opportunities policy and to take all reasonable steps to ensure that their facilities and services are run in an inclusive manner which will both aspire to and promote good relations. All applicants to SNI programmes, including the GAA, are required to adhere to these conditions in order to receive, and continue to receive, funding.

Irish Language Legislation

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been allocated for the implementation of Irish language legislation.

(AQW 3831/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No funding has yet been allocated to the implementation of Irish language legislation.

Moneymore Library

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people were registered as members of Moneymore library in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3833/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has provided me with the following information regarding the number of registered members of Moneymore Library in each of the last fives years:

Year	**2006/07**	**2007/08**	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**
Total Registered	914	1080	816	871	968

Association Football in the Strangford Constituency

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much public funding has been invested in association football in the Strangford constituency since 2007; and for a breakdown of where this funding has been allocated.

(AQW 3849/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of funding. Sport NI has provided no funding to association football in the Strangford constituency since 2007 as no successful applications have been received from football organisations in that area during the period. However, Sport NI is currently considering applications under its Awards for Sport programme for funding totalling

£10,190 from Comber Young Mens FC and Dungoyne Boys FC. Decisions on these are expected in mid November.

Appointment of Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 3379/11-15, whether she is bound by the guidance issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel in September 2011 on the appointment of Special Advisers; and (ii) in the spirit of that guidance if she will review the appointment of Mary McArdle.

(AQW 3890/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for the appointment of Special Advisors remains with individual Ministers and should comply with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisors and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

Department of Education

School Transport

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to detail the contingency plans of the Education and Library Boards, and other agencies and Departments, for school transport including hired buses and taxis, to ensure that children arrive at school in a safe and timely manner during the severe weather conditions expected this winter.

(AQW 3139/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):

The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) are responsible for providing assistance solely for pupils who meet the eligibility criteria for school transport. They have produced guidance for transport contractors who provide their home-to-school transport services in the event of periods of adverse weather conditions. The guidance includes ensuring that:

- the provider checks the latest weather forecast and prevailing conditions before setting out;
- drivers are equipped with a means to contact base/schools/Boards (e.g., mobile phones) and are aware of the numbers to call; and
- in the event of being unable to complete a journey, drivers/providers are advised to inform the school and the ELB. They are also advised to return children to their home if supervision is present or otherwise to remain with the children.

The full guidance, which applies equally to the operation of the Boards' own transport fleet and which includes advice for parents and schools, is available from Education and Library Boards.

Translink is contracted to provide school transport services by the education authorities. With respect to Translink, the Minister for Regional Development has indicated "that Translink has completed a review of winter preparedness and resilience across the organisation as a result of the lengthy period of disruption last winter due to extreme weather.

This review looked at communications plans, fleet availability, staff resources, emergency cover and associated issues, i.e. resource plans. An action plan was drawn up following last year's review and is being progressed.

Home to school transport was given particular priority in discussions. In this particular regard Translink has updated its route risk assessment procedures to ensure that routes are appropriate and safe.

Translink has also reviewed and updated its extreme weather procedures and implemented a bus fleet engineering winterisation programme. Distribution of salt, de-icing and snow clearing products has also been reviewed.

Communications between Translink depots have also been strengthened, bearing in mind that some schools are served by more than one depot. An early warning strategy has also been put in place in order that Translink is notified in a timely manner of ad hoc school closures".

Following last year's severe winter weather, Minister Ruane set up a working group to consider school opening and closing arrangements in bad weather. One of the report's recommendations is that the ELB's meet with Translink regarding their transport contingency arrangements. The DRD Minister has reported Translink's desire to be involved and this meeting is currently being arranged.

Spaces on Local Education Buses

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education, in an instance were a child is not entitled to a seat on a local education bus, whether there are mechanisms in place to enable a parent to pay for a seat for a child if there are additional spaces available on the bus.

(AQW 3592/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Article 52 of The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, as substituted by Article 23 of The Education (NI) Order 1997, permit Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to charge for unfilled seats on Board buses provided the pupil is otherwise ineligible for transport assistance.

I am advised by the ELBs that at present, there are no mechanisms in place to enable parents to pay for additional ("concessionary") seats. Boards currently offer such seats free of charge. I expect that all avenues to achieve best value for money in the provision of home to school transport will be explored in the current financial climate to maximise the funding available to the classroom. This is the remit of the PEDU report into school transport, to be published soon, and will also be an important aspect of the review of school transport – for which terms of reference are currently being developed.

School Buses

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education whether there has been any research commissioned, or evidence gathered, which inidicates that parents may be willing to pay for their children to have access to a free school bus in their area.

(AQW 3593/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No research has been commissioned to garner the views of parents with respect to payment for otherwise empty seats on school buses. At present, such seats, where offered by Education and Library Boards, are provided free of charge. This is an issue I expect the Boards to examine against the need to achieve best value for money in the provision of transport services to maximise the funding available to the classroom. This is the remit of the PEDU report into school transport, to be published soon, and will also be an important aspect of the review of school transport – for which terms of reference are currently being developed.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3605/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) As Minister of Education I have incurred no travel costs since coming into this post on 16 May 2011. However, since 1 April 2011 the Department of Education has been responsible for the running costs of the Ministerial car which amounted to £1,340 for the 6 months from April to September 2011.

(ii) Travel costs incurred by departmental officials amounted to £342,294 in the last 12 months, to 30 September 2011.

Irish-medium Education Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Irish-Medium Education Report.

(AQW 3619/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Amalgamation of Primary Schools in South Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the proposed amalgamation of three primary schools in the South Belfast area, what measures he intends to put in place to ensure that no community is disadvantaged.

(AQW 3827/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I understand that the question refers to the proposed amalgamation of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools.

Planning of the controlled estate in Belfast is a matter for the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) in the first instance. Any significant change to the schools' estate, such as an amalgamation, requires the publication of a statutory development proposal to support that intent. Publication must be preceded by consultation between, in this case, the BELB, Board of Governors, staff and parents of the school as well as wider consultations with schools in the area.

Following the publication of any development proposal, there is a further statutory 2-month consultation period during which anyone may forward their comments to the Department. At the end of the 2month period, I would make a decision on the proposal taking account of all the pertinent issues and the comments received.

I can confirm that my Department is aware that the Board is developing this proposal but to date no proposal to amalgamate these schools has been published. Should a proposal be published I will consider it in the context of the local area. When reaching my decision I look for evidence that the proposal delivers a strong and viable school, both educationally and financially, to ensure that our children and young people have access to the best educational experience possible, whatever their background or wherever they live

Support for Young People with Moderate Learning Difficulties

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education to detail the activities provided or supported by each Education and Library Board for young people with moderate learning difficulties.

(AQW 3858/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have developed a comprehensive range of services and provision to support children and young people with moderate learning difficulties. These can be summarised as follows:

Early Years

All Boards provide services for children in the early years who have been identified with moderate learning difficulties. While there may be some variation between Boards these can generally be accessed through:

- early years teaching support for children and parents in the home setting; this is organised on the basis of referral from either educational psychologists, community paediatricians, or multi-disciplinary teams;
- access to early years projects that are attached to special schools for children who have been assessed by either health or educational staff;
- advice, support and training to nurseries and some playgroups to support the child's effective inclusion in mainstream pre-school settings; and
- in some cases children having statements of special educational needs in the early years. If this is the case, the child may access placement in a nursery with adult assistance, placement in a diagnostic setting, or placement in nursery class that is attached to a special school.

Primary Years

The Boards have developed services and provision to meet the needs of children with moderate learning difficulties in the primary years. These services can be accessed at stages 3, 4, and 5 of the Code of Practice. The core areas of support are:

- advice and support from learning support staff who can advise schools on individual education plans as well as strategies that may be appropriate for specific children;
- outreach support and teaching from staff that are attached to special schools (moderate learning difficulties) for children at stages 3,4 and 5 of the Code of Practice;
- adult assistants in mainstream schools for children who have statements of special educational needs;
- access to placement in learning support classes that are attached to mainstream schools; this provides teaching in a small group placement with inclusion in mainstream classes, as appropriate; and
- placement in special schools that meet the needs of children and young people with moderate learning difficulties.

In addition, children with moderate learning difficulties would access the wide range of programmes for children that can be accessed through extended schools as well as in specific programmes that have been developed with the voluntary sector, including counselling services.

Post-Primary Years

The Boards have developed services and provision to meet the needs of young people in the post-primary years. These services can be accessed at stages 3, 4, and 5 of the Code of Practice. The core areas of support include all of the services offered at primary level and in addition:

- access to transition services to support the planning of young people's needs as they transition from school to adult learning programmes;
- access to counselling services as part of post-primary support;
- participation in a range of course options through the Entitlement Framework; and
- access to education otherwise than at school (EOTAS), if appropriate.

If other special educational needs are identified access to other board services, as well as services delivered by the health sector, can be provided.

Post-16 Education Services for Young People with Moderate Learning Difficulties

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education to detail the statutory requirements for the provision of post-16 education services for young people with moderate learning difficulties.

(AQW 3859/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) rests with both schools and the 5 education and library boards (ELBs) who are responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making provision for children with SEN in their areas.

There are no specific statutory requirements for the provision of post-16 education services for young people with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) or severe learning difficulties (SLD). However, some pupils with statements of special educational needs will remain at school after the age of 16 and ELBs remain responsible for such pupils until the end of the term during which they reach age 19. ELBs are required to review statements at least annually and the first annual review after a young person's 14th birthday (and any subsequent annual reviews) should include a transition plan covering the young person's transition to adult life.

Provision for all children with special educational needs, including those with MLD or SLD, is covered by the special educational needs framework which comprises the Education (NI) Order 1996, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (NI) 2005, the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005 and the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs and the supplement to the Code.

Post-16 Education Services for Young People with Severe Learning Difficulties

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education to detail the statutory requirements for the provision of post-16 education services for young people with severe learning difficulties.

(AQW 3860/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) rests with both schools and the 5 education and library boards (ELBs) who are responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making provision for children with SEN in their areas.

There are no specific statutory requirements for the provision of post-16 education services for young people with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) or severe learning difficulties (SLD). However, some pupils with statements of special educational needs will remain at school after the age of 16 and ELBs remain responsible for such pupils until the end of the term during which they reach age 19. ELBs are required to review statements at least annually and the first annual review after a young person's 14th birthday (and any subsequent annual reviews) should include a transition plan covering the young person's transition to adult life.

Provision for all children with special educational needs, including those with MLD or SLD, is covered by the special educational needs framework which comprises the Education (NI) Order 1996, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (NI) 2005, the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005 and the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs and the supplement to the Code.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education when the South Eastern Education and Library Board will be re-constituted in the same manner as other Boards.

(AQW 3885/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans at present to reconstitute the SouthEastern Education and Library Board. However, I will keep the position under review, taking account of the timescale for the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority as it becomes clearer. My aim is to build political agreement on the way forward, and I hope to be able to bring proposals to the Executive in the near future for the establishment of ESA which will ensure that we have effective, efficient arrangements for education administration, based on local democratic accountability.

Schools Estate

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2901/11-15, AQW 2941/11-15 and AQW 3001/11-15 and, in relation to the information provided on the controlled estate, to detail (i) the total number of (a) schools; and (b) pupils in each school, broken down by Education and Library Board area; and (ii) on what basis the valuations were reached.

(AQW 3896/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information regarding the total number of (a) schools and (b) pupils in each school broken down by Education and Library Board area has been placed in the Assembly Library. This information is also available on the DE website using the following link:

http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_statistics_and_research-schoolleveldata_pg.htm

The valuation of the controlled estate was based on the last formal Land and Property Service valuation at 31 March 2008 and updated annually thereafter by indices provided by Land and Property Service. The next formal valuation of the estate is scheduled for 2012/13.

Queen's University Research on Irish-medium Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education (i) what consideration he has given to the research carried out by Queen's University, Belfast, which highlighted that pupils attending Irish-medium schools significantly out-perform pupils from other sectors; and (ii) for his assessment of whether this demonstrates the need for bi-lingual education in schools.

(AQW 3922/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Queen's University research was considered by the working group set up by the previous Minister to advise the Department on the development of the literacy and numeracy strategy in Irish-medium education. The group's advice was incorporated into the strategy, which sets out the central role of schools and teachers in working to improve literacy and numeracy standards for all their pupils. The research adds to international evidence, and information compiled by ETI for the Review of Irish-medium Education, on the benefits of bi-lingualism. Modern Languages are a statutory part of the revised curriculum at Key Stage 3 and a qualification choice at KS4 and sixth form. Although Modern Languages are not a statutory part of the primary curriculum, the Primary Languages Programme was introduced in 2007 to give our youngest pupils the opportunity to learn an additional language. The Department also has a duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education. It is for individual schools, taking account of evidence and best practice, to determine their approach to the delivery of the curriculum, including the language(s) of instruction and the use of immersion or bi-lingual approaches.

GCSE Grades

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education whether there have been any post-primary schools where less than 10 per cent of pupils have left without gaining five GCSE grades in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3923/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

The schools and the percentages of school leavers where less than 10 per cent achieve at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalent qualifications) are listed below.

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL LEAVERS ACHIEVING AT LEAST 5 GCSES A*-C (INC. EQUIVALENTS) 2007/08

- Ballee Community High School 6.4%

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL LEAVERS ACHIEVING AT LEAST 5 GCSES A*-C (INC. EQUIVALENTS) 2008/09

- Ballee Community High School 9.5%
- Movilla High School 9.6%
- Orangefield High School *
- St Marys High School, Belleek *

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL LEAVERS ACHIEVING AT LEAST 5 GCSES A*-C (INC. EQUIVALENTS) 2009/10

- Dunmurry High School 9.8%
- Movilla High School 6.0%

* denotes fewer than five pupils

Source: School Leavers Survey

School Property: Total Value

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2941/11-15, what is meant by the terms (i) timeframe; and (ii) within reasonable cost.

(AQW 3964/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most recent valuation of the controlled schools' estate was carried out by the Land and Property Services Agency in 2008. To extend this survey to cover all non-controlled assets would take approximately 4 months and incur cost considerably in excess of the £700 allowed for the preparation of answers to Assembly questions.

Area Learning Community Programme Participation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils taking part in an Area Learning Community Programme, broken down by (i) sector; and (ii) council area.

(AQW 3985/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold the information requested. Schools from maintained and controlled sectors do work together and with others to plan and deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of their pupils within the Area Learning Community. Such collaboration is helpful in avoiding duplication of scarce resources as well as enriching the educational experience for pupils, teachers and schools. As I made clear in my statement to the Assembly on 26 September, collaboration is not an

end in itself and schools should be planning on the basis that pupils, particularly between the ages of 14-16, should be able to access most of their curriculum within their own school.

Newbuilds: Priority Order

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the priority order of the new builds for schools which have received approval but are not yet scheduled to commence due to a lack of funding.

(AQW 3986/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors to co-ordinate a strategic area planning exercise based on each ELB area to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Previously identified projects will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed and may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. No school building project will be looked at in isolation but must be considered in the context of the wider area.

At this time no funding has been allocated for new builds, other than for those projects already on site.

Newbuilds: Lack of Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the new builds for schools which have been approved but are unlikely to commence by 2015 due to a lack of funding.

(AQW 3988/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors to co-ordinate a strategic area planning exercise based on each ELB area to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Previously identified projects will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed and may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. No school building project will be looked at in isolation but must be considered in the context of the wider area.

At this time no funding has been allocated for new builds, other than for those projects already on site.

Newbuilds Scheduled to Commence by 2015

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools which have been allocated funding for a new build that is scheduled to commence by 2015.

(AQW 3990/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors to co-ordinate a strategic area planning exercise based on each ELB area to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Previously identified projects will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed and may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. No school building project will be looked at in isolation but must be considered in the context of the wider area.

At this time no funding has been allocated for new builds, other than for those projects already on site.

Department for Employment and Learning

St Mary's University College, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 2535/11-15, for his assessment of the promotion of practising of equal opportunity employment at St Mary's University College, Belfast given that people from a Protestant background make up only 7 per cent of the workforce.

(AQW 3358/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I refer you to my previous answer to AQW 3006/11-15, which states that St. Mary's University College is an Equal Opportunities Employer and recognises that those with a Protestant background are underrepresented amongst its staff. The College has a Religious Affirmative Action Plan in place that is reviewed on a three-yearly basis in collaboration with the Equality Commission.

The College also actively promotes the recruitment of Protestant staff. In the employment opportunities section of its website, St Mary's declares that it "is an Equal Opportunities Employer and welcomes applications from all sections of the community. As Protestants are currently underrepresented among the staff, applications from this section of the community would be particularly welcome."

Staff: Third Level Education Courses

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of staff in his Department who have undertaken a third level education course paid for (a) in whole; or (b) in part by his Department in each of the last three years; (ii) the (a) titles; (b) fees or costs of the courses of study undertaken; (iii) if the course was full-time or part-time; and (iv) the educational institute which provided the course.

(AQW 3383/11-15)

Dr Farry: A table is attached providing details requested above.

THE NUMBER OF STAFF IN THE DEPARMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING WHO HAVE UNDERTAKEN A THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION COURSE PAID FOR IN FULL OR PART BY THE DEPARTMENT

September 2008 - June 2009							
The Title of the course	**No. of Staff**	**Fees or costs of the course of study undertaken**	**Paid in Whole**	**Paid in part**	**Full Time**	**Part Time**	**Educational institute which provided the course**
BSc Hons/BA Hons Business Studies	3	£2,239		£1,790		Yes	Open University, University of Ulster - Magee, University of Ulster - Coleraine
BSc Hons in Social Sciences	3	£1,220		£976		Yes	Open University

September 2008 - June 2009							
The Title of the course	**No. of Staff**	**Fees or costs of the course of study undertaken**	**Paid in Whole**	**Paid in part**	**Full Time**	**Part Time**	**Educational institute which provided the course**
HNC in Business Studies	2	£798		£638		Yes	University of Ulster - Jordanstown, BMC Brunswick St Campus
Level 4 Professional CIM Certificate in Marketing	1	£942		£458		Yes	Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) Brunswick St Campus
MSc in Industrial Relations & HR Management	1	£1,250		£1,000		Yes	Distance Learning with Keele University, Staffordshire
Postgraduate Diploma Personnel Management	1	£1,290		£1,000		Yes	Queens University Belfast
MSc in Innovation Management in the Public Service	1	£5,750		£2,875		Yes	University of Ulster - Magee and Letterkenny Institute of Technology

September 2009 - June 2010							
The Title of the course	**No. of Staff**	**Fees or costs of the course of study undertaken**	**Paid in Whole**	**Paid in part**	**Full Time**	**Part time**	**Educational institute which provided the course**
BSc Hons in Business Studies	4	£3,154		£2,193		Yes	University of Ulster - Jordanstown, University of Ulster - Coleraine, 2 @ University of Ulster - Magee
BSc Hons Environmental Policy	1	£630		£504		Yes	Open University

September 2009 - June 2010							
The Title of the course	**No. of Staff**	**Fees or costs of the course of study undertaken**	**Paid in Whole**	**Paid in part**	**Full Time**	**Part time**	**Educational institute which provided the course**
HNC in Business Studies	1	£395		£328		Yes	BMC Brunswick St Campus
MSc in Business Studies	1	£2,500		£1,000		Yes	University of Ulster - Jordanstown
MSc in Careers & Guidance	4	£4,444		£3,720		Yes	University of Ulster - Magee,
MSc in Industrial Relations & Human Resource Management	1	£1,850		£1,000		Yes	Distance Learning with Keele University, Staffordshire
Post Graduate Certificate in Communication	1	£250		£142		Yes	Loughry College, Cookstown (Teaching Centre for Queen's University)
MSc in Innovation Management in the Public Service	3	£17,250		£8,625		Yes	University of Ulster - Magee and Letterkenny Institute of Technology

September 2010 - 2011							
The Title of the course	**No. of Staff**	**Fees or costs of the course of study undertaken**	**Paid in Whole**	**Paid in part**	**Full Time**	**Part time**	**Educational institute which provided the course**
BA Hons/ BSc Hons in Business Studies	5	£3,873		£2,217		Yes	Open University, University of Ulster-Jordanstown, University of Ulster - Coleraine, 2 @ University of Ulster - Magee

September 2010 - 2011							
The Title of the course	**No. of Staff**	**Fees or costs of the course of study undertaken**	**Paid in Whole**	**Paid in part**	**Full Time**	**Part time**	**Educational institute which provided the course**
BA Hons in Leadership & Management	2	£3,050		£1,216		Yes	Open University
BA/BSc (HONS) Criminology	1	£148		£117		Yes	Open University
BA/BSc in Social Sciences	1	£1,400		£1,000		Yes	Open University
Foundation Degree in Counselling	6	£4,225		£2,577		Yes	Southern Regional College Newry and Banbridge, Northern Regional College (NRC), Antrim, 3 at NRC Ballymena
HNC in IT & Administration	2	£951		£320		Yes	North West Regional College
LLB (HONS) Law	1	£1,091		£355		Yes	University of Ulster - Jordanstown
MSc in Careers Guidance	4	£5,320		£2,866		Yes	University of Ulster - Magee
MSc in Communication	2	£1,092		£291		Yes	Oueen's University- Loughry College
MSc in Innovation Management in the Public Service	2	£5,750		£5,750		Yes	University of Ulster - Magee and Letterkenny Institute of Technology

St Mary's University College, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the number of staff from a Protestant background employed at St Mary's University College in each year since the Equal Opportunities Employment Statement was adopted by the Board of Govenors in October 1998.

(AQW 3438/11-15)

Dr Farry: St. Mary's University College has provided the information attached at Annex A

Annex A

St. Mary's University College

Composition of Staff by Community Background

Monitoring Year	No. of Catholic Staff	No. of Protestant Staff	No. of Non-Determined Staff	Total Staff
Feb. 2011	151	12	6	169
Feb. 2010	149	11	9	169
Feb. 2009	155	11	7	173
Feb. 2008	167	13	7	187
Feb. 2007	160	11	7	178
Feb. 2006	158	8	7	173
Feb. 2005	162	8	8	178
Feb. 2004	162	10	6	178
Feb. 2003	157	11	5	173
Feb. 2002	155	8	0	163
Feb. 2001	157	7	3	167
Feb. 2000	162	5	2	169
Feb. 1999	160	3	1	164
Feb. 1998	151	1	1	153

Second Languages

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he plans to promote and prioritise the learning of a second language, given how important a second language can be in gaining employment.

(AQW 3489/11-15)

Dr Farry: At present, a significant demand for language skills is not being articulated by employers through the various mechanisms in place for them to do so. However, as a result of the impending Economic Strategy and its focus on "export led growth", there may be a shift in the skills sought from the workforce, and this may include an increased demand from employers for these skills. Should such a skills need be identified in the future, mechanisms exist through the Department's HE, FE and training provision to address these.

Regarding provision, while my Department sets the strategic direction for the Further and Higher Education sectors, each institution is responsible for its own curriculum offer, including the teaching of languages.

The Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs') offer 'stand alone' modern language degrees, while students in non-language disciplines have the opportunity to study a modern language in addition to their primary subject(s).

Students at Northern Ireland HEIs who are undertaking a modern language degree are encouraged to spend a year abroad (as part of their degree course) either working or studying, in order to deepen their understanding of the host culture and improve their language skills. The Department also encourages student mobility as part of an overall portfolio of employability skills which can enhance their future

career prospects in an internationally competitive graduate job market. The Department co-funds and promotes the Erasmus staff and student mobility programme which is administered by the British Council.

Further Education Colleges currently offer an extensive range of language courses as part of their curriculum provision. These courses are proactively marketed within the Colleges' websites and prospectuses and by active use of a variety of social media.

Colleges offer a wide range of course provision, tailored to meet local needs. Decisions on whether a specific course runs are driven by the level of demand locally and it is the responsibility of individual colleges to meet the needs of learners and employers in their areas in a cost effective way that ensures best use of public money.

Colleges also currently engage in marketing the College's language provision to a variety of external businesses, employers and partners. The Colleges are aware of the importance of providing opportunities for students to diversify their knowledge and skills in the acquisition of a new language and have witnessed a significant increase in the cultural diversity of the student population in recent years.

My department's Careers Service would encourage students to study and gain qualifications in a modern language if an individual demonstrated an aptitude for, or expressed an interest in, a career where a language may be necessary or advantageous. Careers advisers would provide appropriate impartial information, advice and guidance to support students to make informed decisions in relation to their future career plans.

In both 2008/09 and 2009/10, there were approximately 13,000 enrolments on language, literature and culture courses delivered by FE colleges in Northern Ireland.

Transport Difficulties Faced by Students in Bad Weather

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he plans to facilitate any discussions between Translink and universities and further education colleges regarding the transport difficulties faced by students in bad weather, given that many institutions only accept transport difficulties as an excuse for lateness or non-attendance if Translink officially announces that a train is cancelled.

(AQW 3507/11-15)

Dr Farry: While I have no plans to facilitate any discussions between Translink and the universities and the further education colleges I have referred your question to the college Directors and university Vice-Chancellors who will respond directly to you.

Appointment of Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the status within his Department of the Department of Finance and Personnel's review of the appointment of Special Advisers.

(AQW 3559/11-15)

Dr Farry: A copy of the review report on the appointment of Special Advisers has been placed in the Assembly library. The review was implemented for all future appointments with effect from 6 September 2011.

Modern Languages

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students have graduated with degrees in a modern language in each of the last ten years, broken down by (i) the institution from which they qualified; and (ii) the language in which they gained a qualification.

(AQW 3580/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of students who have gained qualifications across all levels of study in modern languages in each of the last 10 years broken down by (i) the institution from which they qualified and; (ii) the language in which they gained a qualification is detailed below.

1999/2000

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French Languages, Literature and Culture	20	5
Italian Languages, Literature and Culture	0	0
Spanish Languages, Literature and Culture	10	0
Other European Languages, Literature and Culture	35	5
Japanese Languages, Literature and Culture	0	0
Other Language Studies	0	5
Other or Unspecified Modern Languages	0	15

2000/2001

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French Languages, Literature and Culture	15	5
Spanish Languages, Literature and Culture	10	0
Other European Languages, Literature and Culture	25	0
Other Language Studies	0	20
Other or Unspecified Modern Languages	0	30

2001/2002

Subject	Queen's University Belfast	University of Ulster
French Language, Literature & Culture	10	0
German Language, Literature & Culture	5	0
Italian Language, Literature & Culture	0	0
Spanish Language, Literature & Culture	5	0
Other European Languages, Literature & Culture	30	0
Other Language Studies	0	10
Other or Unspecified Modern Languages	0	15

2002/2003

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French studies	50	5
German studies	5	0
Italian studies	0	0
Spanish studies	30	0

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
Others in European languages, literature & related subjects	0	40
Japanese Studies	0	0
African Studies	0	0

2003/2004

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French studies	60	5
German studies	10	0
Italian studies	0	0
Spanish studies	40	5
Others in European languages, literature & related subjects	0	20

2004/2005

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French studies	35	5
German studies	25	0
Spanish studies	35	10
Others in European languages, literature & related subjects	0	15

2005/2006

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French studies	55	5
German studies	10	0
Spanish studies	40	5
Others in European languages, literature & related subjects	0	15

2006/2007

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French studies	40	10
German studies	15	0

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
Spanish studies	30	15
Others in European languages, literature & related subjects	0	5
Chinese studies	0	5

2007/2008

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French studies	40	15
German studies	15	5
Spanish studies	40	10
Others in European languages, literature & related subjects	0	5
Chinese studies	0	5

2008/2009

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French studies	35	15
German studies	5	5
Spanish studies	35	5
Others in European languages, literature & related subjects	0	5
Chinese studies	0	5

2009/2010

Subject	The Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster
French studies	40	15
German studies	10	0
Spanish studies	40	15
Others in European languages, literature & related subjects	0	5
Chinese studies	0	5

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5, with 0, 1 and 2 rounded to 0.

2. Comparison between subjects from 2002/03 onwards and 2001/02 and earlier should be viewed in the context of the following changes: -

- Subject area groupings in 1999/00, 2000/01 and 2001/02 are different to those from 2002/03 onwards. Consequently subject areas within each group may have changed.
- In addition a new procedure for apportioning students to subject areas was introduced in 2002/03. Under the previous system, students were allocated to a subject area which reflected the majority of their course. When this was not possible they were allocated to the combined subject area.

Modern Languages: Qualifications

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department has taken to encourage students to study and gain qualifications in a modern langauge.

(AQW 3581/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's Careers Service would encourage students to study and gain qualifications in a modern language if an individual demonstrated an aptitude for, or expressed an interest in, a career where a language may be necessary or advantageous. Careers advisers would provide appropriate impartial information, advice and guidance to support students to make informed decisions in relation to their future career plans.

While my Department sets the strategic direction for the Further and Higher Education Sectors, each institution is responsible for its own curriculum offer including the teaching of languages.

The Higher Education Institutions offer 'stand alone' modern language degrees, while students in non-language disciplines have the opportunity to study a modern language in addition to their primary subject(s).

Students at Northern Ireland HEIs who are undertaking a modern language degree are encouraged to spend a year abroad (as part of their degree course) either working or studying, in order to deepen their understanding of the host culture and improve their language skills. The Department also encourages student mobility as part of an overall portfolio of employability skills which can enhance their future career prospects in an internationally competitive graduate job market. The Department co-funds and promotes the Erasmus staff and student mobility programme which is administered by the British Council.

Further Education Colleges currently offer an extensive range of language courses as part of their curriculum provision. These courses are proactively marketed within the Colleges websites and prospectuses and by active use of a variety of social media.

Colleges offer a wide range of course provision, tailored to meet local needs. Decisions on whether a specific course runs are driven by the level of demand locally and it is the responsibility of individual colleges to meet the needs of learners and employers in their areas in a cost effective way that ensures best use of public money.

Recent years have witnessed an increase in the demand for language provision, and as a result colleges have proactively planned to embed language provision within a number of specific curriculum areas.

Colleges also currently engage in marketing their language provision to a variety of external businesses, employers and partners. The colleges are aware of the importance of providing opportunities for students to diversify their knowledge and skills in the acquisition of a new language.

In both 2008/09 and 20089/10, there were approximately 13,000 enrolments on language, literature and culture courses delivered by FE colleges in Northern Ireland.

Modern Language Courses

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what modern language courses are available at Further Education Colleges; and how many students are enrolled in each course.

(AQW 3582/11-15)

Dr Farry: While my Department sets the strategic direction for the Further Education Sector, each college is responsible for its own curriculum offer including the teaching of modern language courses.

The Department does not have information on the number of modern language courses that are available in the current year, nor the number of students enrolled on each course. However, colleges have confirmed that they offer courses in a range of languages from non-accredited beginner courses up to and including Level 3 Certificates.

I can inform you that in 2009/10, the last year for which validated data is available, within the UK-wide subject grouping "Language, Literature and Culture," Further Education Colleges had 12,904 enrolments on the following courses in languages: Language Studies, (45); Literary Studies, (104); English Language & Literature, (951); English Literature, (602); Modern English Studies, (69); English for Speakers of Other Languages, (6036); Literacy, (74); Others in English, (280); Other Celtic Languages, (619); French, (945); German, (186); Italian, (587); Spanish, (1644); Portuguese, (84); Russian, (56); Polish, (68); Dutch, (12); Modern Greek, (27); Others in Other or General European Languages, (37); Chinese, (31); Japanese, (113); Arabic, (31); Other Modern Middle Eastern Languages, (70); Other Language Studies, (226); and Conference Interpretation, (7).

Apprenticeship Places

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the apprentice places currently available at each Further Education College.

(AQW 3611/11-15)

Dr Farry: ApprenticeshipsNI is a demand-led provision and, as such, the number of places available is determined by employers based on the needs of their business. There are currently a record number of 12,858 apprentices on programme which is a substantial achievement in these challenging economic times. The current numbers following an apprenticeship, as part of ApprenticeshipsNI, at Northern Ireland's six Regional Colleges are detailed overleaf.

APPRENTICESHIPS NI

Regional College	No. of Apprentices
Belfast Metropolitan College	570
North West Regional College	103
Northern Regional College	306
South Eastern Regional College	376
South West College	850
Southern Regional College	549
Totals	**2754**

St Mary's University College, Belfast: Board of Governors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the proportion of Catholic and Protestant members on the Board of Governors at St Mary's University College, Belfast.

(AQW 3624/11-15)

Dr Farry: St. Mary's University College has informed me that it does not hold this information. The College is obliged to monitor the community background of its employees and is not under an obligation to monitor the community background of its Board members. The proportion of Catholic and Protestant members on the Board of Governors cannot, therefore, be determined.

University Enrolments

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 2962/11-15, what action he intends to take to address the considerable under-representation of Protestants at local universities.

(AQW 3638/11-15)

Dr Farry: Participation in higher education from a Protestant background is broadly in line with Protestant representation within the school leaving population of Northern Ireland. Each year there are slightly higher numbers of Protestant students who choose to study at institutions in Great Britain, which means that proportionately fewer study within Northern Ireland. In general, there is no underrepresentation of Protestants in higher education.

However, while participation levels are generally lower from working class areas across Northern Ireland, Protestant working class boys are among the most under-represented groups in Higher Education, (but are overepresented in Further Education). Under-representation for this group is much more marked for students entitled to free school meals.

The key to increasing the uptake of university places from the Protestant working class is to raise aspirations and attainment levels while young people are still in school. While that is primarily a matter for the Department of Education and the school sector, my Department provides special project funding which allows the universities to develop partnerships with non-selective schools in disadvantaged areas. Pupils from controlled post-primary schools, in areas with traditionally low levels of participation in higher education, are specifically targeted for inclusion in programmes such as Step-Up and Discovering Queens. In academic year 2011/12, my Department has allocated £2.2 million to help to widen participation from groups under-represented in higher education.

My Department also recognises that addressing disadvantage and exclusion will require coordinated action and consequently it is leading on the development of a new integrated Regional Strategy for Widening Participation in Higher Education. This work is progressing in partnership with other key stakeholders from further and higher education, employers, disabled and community representatives and other government Departments.

Student Places: Increase in 2012-13

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning which universities and further education colleges are due to receive an increase in student places in 2012/13; and how many places each institution will receive.

(AQW 3674/11-15)

Dr Farry: As the member may be aware, the Executive has made available a total of £3m for additional Higher Education places by 2014/15. The exact number of additional places that this will fund, and the allocation of those places across the Higher Education Institutions and the Further Education Colleges, has not yet been determined. I would plan to be in a position to confirm exact allocations in the coming weeks.

Recruitment of Students from a Protestant Working Class Background

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what bursaries the University of Ulster offers to help counter its deficit in recruitment of students from a Protestant working class background; and if he will examine the scope for the use of such bursaries for this purpose.

(AQW 3690/11-15)

Dr Farry: Higher Education institutions wishing to charge more than the minimum tuition fee are obliged by my Department to have Access Agreements which must provide for financial and other support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Within its Access Agreement the University of Ulster commits funding to safeguard and promote fair access in accordance with its Equality Policy Scheme through which equality of opportunity is provided to all. In academic year 2011/12 the University offers a bursary of £800 to full-time first year undergraduate students who have residual household income of £19,203 or less. A pro-rata bursary is also payable to students undertaking less than a full-time course.

My Department has no plans to introduce bursaries to support the recruitment into higher education of students from a Protestant working class background. However, my Department is leading on the development of an integrated Regional Strategy for Widening Participation in Higher Education. One of the key aims of the Strategy will be to direct and focus institutional efforts to support widening participation among those groups which are under-represented in higher education. This will be achieved through projects which will raise aspiration and educational attainment among the most disadvantaged in our society and develop additional support measures to sustain their continuing participation.

St Mary's University College, Belfast: Applications

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students from Catholic maintained post primary schools who applied for places at St Mary's University College, Belfast in each of the last four years; and how many of these applications were successful.

(AQW 3707/11-15)

Dr Farry: St. Mary's University College has provided the information attached at Annex A.

ANNEX A

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE APPLICANTS FROM CATHOLIC MAINTAINED SCHOOLS IN EACH OF THE LAST FOUR YEARS

Year	Applicants	Successful Entry
2008	490	154
2009	589	211
2010	760	151
2011	640	176

Capital Spend Projects for Higher and Further Education

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the priority order of the proposed reserve capital spend projects for higher and further education should the planned capital projects in these sectors not be completed.

(AQW 3735/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department's current further education capital budget is largely committed to major projects already delivered or nearing completion. Remaining unallocated funds of £2m in each of the next two financial years and £4m in the following year are earmarked for minor works projects across all colleges. Calls for bids have not been made at this stage.

The Department has informed the Higher Education Institutions of the capital funding available to them over the four year period commencing 2011/12. The Department is confident that the capital strategies each institution has in place will absorb the available funding in full.

Given the work that is required and how quickly the information becomes dated in terms of costings and Planning Permissions, for example, it is not common practice to identify reserve capital projects and none are currently held.

The Department will be examining its range of priorities when the Strategic Investment Board's Investment Strategy Northern Ireland (ISNI), Version 3 is produced, which we understand will be in the near future.

Moving Up Programme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to detail the funding providers of the Moving Up Programme; (ii) how many staff will be employed in this programme; and (iii) for an estimate of the number of people who will benefit from the programme.

(AQW 3739/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Praxis Care charity is currently funded under Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Programme 2007 -13 to deliver the Moving Up Programme. The funding offered for the Moving Up Programme covers a three year period, 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2014 and totals £2,171,767, comprising £868,707 from the European Social Fund, £542,942 from the Department for Employment and Learning, and £942,118 match funding contribution from Praxis Care. The project plans to employ 49 staff covering five centres of delivery and to assist 94 participants.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what mechanisms are in place to verify that recipients of Educational Maintenance Allowance are living at the home of a parent or guardian as stated in their application.

(AQW 3779/11-15)

Dr Farry: In relation to the means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance scheme, a home address check is carried out on all applications by obtaining the relevant household Tax Credit Award Notification form and matching the stated address against the address supplied by the student in the Education Maintenance Allowance application form. If the Tax Credit Award Notification form is not available, a household utility bill issued within the last three months is obtained to make the verification check.

In relation to the non means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance which is paid to those young persons who are participating in the Training forSuccess programme, there is no requirement for them to be residing at the home of a parent or guardian in order to receive that allowance.

Lifelong Learning: Young People with Severe Learning Disabilities

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the current opportunities for life long learning for young people with severe learning disabilities when they leave school at 19 years of age.

(AQO 691/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and its delivery partners provide life long learning opportunities for young people with severe learning disabilities across a wide range of services. The key areas of activity are set out below.

Further Education Colleges collaborate with special schools and adult day centres to provide discrete courses for young people with severe learning disabilities. Such provision may be delivered on college premises, at a day centre, or other suitable premises.Colleges are keen to offer courses locally, where possible, which take account of individual needs and local circumstances, subject to demand. However, further education provision is not suitable for every young person with severe learning disabilities, particularly those for whom nursing and other personal care may be required.

Widening participation in higher education by students from those groups who are currently under-represented is one of the Department's key strategic goals, in particular, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The Department funds universities to support students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including costs incurred in attending courses and to provide a non medical helper.

Also, young people on Training for Success and ApprenticeshipNI programmes who require additional specialist support will be given every opportunity to overcome difficulties and to develop using the most appropriate support mechanisms. Specialist support providers are contracted by the Department to work in conjunction with Suppliers delivering these programmes.

The Disability Employment Service (DES) provides a range of vocational and pre-vocational programmes to meet the needs of disabled people whatever their age. The programme that is appropriate for each individual is discussed and agreed with Advisers - who work with a team of Occupational Psychologists to assist in the provision of suitable support to individuals. The programmes are demand-led and much of the provision is individually assessed.

Additionally, DES purchases residential vocational training opportunities from Parkanaur College, Dungannon. This provision offers training in Business Administration, Horticulture, Catering and Upholstery and is available to disabled people over the age of 18 who are unable to access mainstream Departmental training or Further Education provision due to the effects of their disability.

The Department's Careers Service provides support to young people to assist them in making effective choices in relation to education, training and employment.

Finally, DEL is responsible for the implementation of the NI European Social Fund Programme, 2007-2013. Priority 1 of the programme, ' Helping people into sustainable employment' supports projects that offer training to people disadvantaged from entering the labour market and those seeking further skills. Some of these projects focus exclusively upon participants with a disability. Currently, there are 17 projects in receipt of assistance in relation to participants with a mental health difficulty, learning disability or physical disability.

European Social Fund

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the European Social Fund project applications which were successful in 2011 to date, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 3900/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have attached a link to the ESF website that provides details of all successful projects that have received ESF funding under the 1st and 2nd calls to Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland European Social fund 2007-2013.

http://www.delni.gov.uk/list-of-successful-esf-projects-second-call.pdf

http://www.delni.gov.uk/list_of_esf_successful_projects_-_apr_2010.ppt

Open and competitive 'calls' to projects seeking ESF funding are organised on a regional basis and my Department provides reports on spending and progress against targets as a region to the European Commission and the UK Government, as set out in the Operational Programme.

Details of European Social Fund 2007-2013 funding therefore are not held by constituency but by Northern Ireland as a region.

European Social Fund

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many projects which were granted European Social Funding in 2011 to date had to withdraw because they were unable to obtain match funding.

(AQW 3903/11-15)

Dr Farry: Priority 1 of the NIESF Programme 2007-13 is entitled 'Helping people into sustainable employment' and aims to assist unemployed and economically inactive people by helping them to enter, remain, and make progress in sustained employment. 82 projects were successful under the second call for Priority 1 ESF funding which was commissioned in 2010, and all but one has indicated that their requisite match funding has been secured. The one remaining project has recently advised my Department that they have secured match funding and the process will be completed shortly. Consequently, it is anticipated that all of our funding offers under the second call have been or are about to be taken up.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Broadband in Annahilt, Co. Down

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether he has any plans to invest in and upgrade broadband in Annahilt, Co. Down.

(AQW 3291/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): My Department has invested significantly in delivering higher speed business-focused broadband services of up to 40Mbps across Northern Ireland, including Annahilt through our Next Generation Broadband Project.

Looking forward we have secured £4.4m under the UK Coalition Government's Broadband Delivery UK initiative. This will be used, alongside funds allocated under the Executive's budget for 2011/12 to 2014/15to deliver higher speed services of at least 2Mbps into those areas of Northern Ireland currently unable to access fixed line services at that speed. Work to scope those areas continues.

I am also aware that a local network operator, North West Electronics is examining the commercial case to deliver higher specification fixed-wireless services into the area.

Foreign Direct Investment Generated by Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of jobs created as a result of foreign direct investment generated by each of InvestNI's fourteen offices worldwide, in each financial year since 2006/07.

(AQW 3298/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has a network of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) offices located in North America (Boston, New York, San Jose), Europe (London, Brussels, Dublin) and South Asia (Mumbai). These offices primarily focus on promoting Northern Ireland as a location capable of providing solutions to the business needs of new investors. Invest NI also has FDI representation in Toronto and Tokyo.

In addition, Invest NI operates Trade Development Centres in Dubai, Mumbai, Jeddah, Dusseldorf and Shanghai which provide practical assistance to Northern Ireland companies seeking to develop and secure new business and strategic partnerships in those markets.

Inward investment is the culmination of a process involving the participation of many Invest NI teams engaging with multi-location enterprises across different offices and regions. As such, it is not possible to align each investment with a particular office.

The table below details the number of jobs promoted and safeguarded by the region of origin of the investment in the five year period from 2006-07 to 2010-11.

Jobs promoted and safeguarded 2006-07 to 2010-11 by region of ownership

Region of Ownership	2006-07		2007-08		2008-09		2009-10		2010-11		TOTAL	
	New jobs	Safe Jobs	New jobs	Safe Jobs	New jobs	Safe Jobs	New jobs	Safe Jobs	New jobs	Safe Jobs	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Continental Europe	398	90	235	264	708	0	382	53	136	30	1,859	437
North America	838	60	422	1,102	1,591	0	853	4	764	0	4,468	1,166
Great Britain	63	0	308	67	218	3	351	1,001	1,406	13	2,346	1,084
RoI	818	21	324	30	428	152	76	58	305	0	1,951	261
India	1,227	0	834	0	0	0	86	0	100	0	2,247	0
Japan	30	0	552	0	6	0	1	16	87	0	676	16
Rest of World	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	0	18	0	35	0
Grand Total	**3,374**	**171**	**2,675**	**1,463**	**2,951**	**155**	**1,766**	**1,132**	**2,816**	**43**	**13,582**	**2,964**

1. New jobs promoted are those jobs that are expected to be created.
2. Safe Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported.
3. Figures include first-time inward investments, reinvestments and business development projects by existing externally-owned clients.

Green New Deal: Reallocation of Renewable Heat Incentive Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given to reallocating some of the money earmarked for the Renewable Heat Incentive to the Green New Deal.

(AQW 3299/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) has provided my Department with funding of £25m, over the next four years, for the development and implementation of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) for Northern Ireland. This money represents a proportion of the funding available to the Department of Energy and Climate Change for the implementation of the Great Britain RHI. The £25m is ring-fenced and has been provided on the basis that it will be utilised specifically for a Northern Ireland RHI.

Renewable Heat Incentive

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the changes to the Renewable Heat Incentive in Great Britain will affect plans for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3300/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I understand that the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) in Great Britain has been delayed as the European Commission requires the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to reduce the tariff for large biomass. DECC is now revising regulations, to reflect this change in tariff, in advance of implementation by the end of November 2011.

The proposed Northern Ireland RHI, as outlined by my Department in the July consultation document, is separate and different to the Great Britain RHI. The changes to the Great Britain

RHI should not directly affect DETI's proposals. My Department will, of course, continue to liaise with colleagues in DECC as both schemes are developed and implemented.

Renewable Heat Incentive

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to detail the time limit for the £25 million Treasury funding for a Renewable Heat Initiative; and (ii) given the European Commission's concerns regarding Great Britain's Renewable Heat Initiative process, how she intends to ensure that her Department's plans are not delayed.

(AQW 3327/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has been allocated £25m from Her Majesty's Treasury for the development of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) for Northern Ireland. The funding breaks down as follows:

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
£2m	£4m	£7m	£12m

I understand that the Great Britain RHI has just recently received approval from the European Commission subject to a reduction in the large biomass tariff. The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) is now revising regulations in advance of implementing the RHI before the end of November. My Department will seek to work with colleagues from DECC as European approval is sought for the Northern Ireland scheme.

Renewable Heat Incentive

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she expects to introduce a Renewable Heat Initiative for domestic properties.

(AQW 3328/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has recently conducted a public consultation into the potential design and implementation of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) in Northern Ireland. As part of this consultation it was proposed to introduce a RHI for non-domestic customers from April 2012 and extend the scheme to domestic properties by October 2012. It was also proposed that DETI would make available capital grant support for domestic customers through Renewable Heat Premium Payments in the interim.

My officials are currently considering responses to the public consultation in advance of finalising proposals. I would not wish to pre-judge this process by making further announcements to those contained within the consultation documents.

Arm's-length Bodies: Value for Money Audits

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has (a) carried out any value for money audits on its arm's-length bodies it funds; and (b) identified any savings that could be made by these bodies.

(AQW 3332/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) The Department is participating in the arms length body review being conducted centrally by the Budget Review Group to establish the scope for abolition, merger or absorption into departmental structures of each body. The Budget Review Group is expected to convey its recommendations to the Executive in due course.

(ii) As part of the Budget 2011-15 process, DETI will deliver cash releasing efficiencies of £8.5m over the Budget period. Further details on the Savings Delivery Plans can be accessed via the DETI website at www.detini.gov.uk.

Energy Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the policy requirement to promote the development and maintenance of an efficient, economic and co-ordinated gas industry will be revised in the forthcoming Energy Bill, to create a more sustainable energy policy.

(AQW 3337/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently scoping a new Energy Bill. This consideration, which includes looking at the duties and objectives of both the Department and the Utility Regulator with a view to ensuring that they remain fit for purpose, is still in the early stages of development and Executive clearance will be sought to consult on the key measures to be included in the Bill in the spring of 2012.

Utility Regulator's Energy Efficiency Schemes and the Green New Deal

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any consideration has been given to consolidating the Utility Regulator's energy efficiency schemes with the Green New Deal.

(AQW 3339/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) is the responsibility of the independent Utility Regulator: it is that body which will decide the future of that scheme. I understand that Utility Regulator officials have met Green New Deal (GND) representatives to advise them that the GND, which has not registered to become a primary bidder for this funding, is eligible to bid for NISEP funding in consortium with other organisations which have registered as primary bidders.

My Department is working with other relevant bodies, including the Utility Regulator, to carry out a study into options for increasing energy efficiency activities in Northern Ireland. This work includes examining how existing and proposed programmes, including GND, might work together to achieve energy saving targets.

October Monitoring Round: Easements

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any easements that have been identified by her Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3360/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The following table details the easements identified in October 2011 monitoring:

	Resource £m	Capital £m
Invest NI – generation of additional receipts	1.5	4.8
Invest NI – lower than anticipated drawdown mainly due to changed economic conditions	7.9	6.3
DETI Interreg IVA match funding – promoters implementing projects slower than forecast	0.4	1.0
De minimis easements (individual easements each below £1m)	1.0	0.6
Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS) Loan Repayment – not budgeted as deal not agreed at time of Budget	-	8.7
PMS Loan Interest not budgeted – reason as per Loan repayment	1.2	-

Belfast City Council Area: Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3364/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department's expenditure cannot be meaningfully disaggregated at district council level and retrieving what would be unrepresentative information over a ten year period would incur a disproportionate cost.

Current Businesses

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of current businesses are (i) small and medium sized enterprises; and (ii) Foreign Direct Investment businesses.

(AQW 3369/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Office of National Statistics' Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR) contains information on all businesses in the United Kingdom which are VAT registered and/or operating a PAYE scheme. The latest published data from the IDBR indicates that over 99% of such businesses in Northern Ireland are SMEs, while our own Northern Ireland business surveys suggest that SMEs account for around 48% of employment.

The IDBR also indicates that there were a total of 69,665 businesses operating in Northern Ireland at March 2010. Of these 725 (1%) were classed as foreign-owned with a single non- United Kingdom shareholding in excess of 50%. The register suggests that these 725 foreign-owned businesses accounted for around 10% of employment and some 27% of turnover in Northern Ireland.

Grants

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of grants allocated by her Department in 2010/11 went to (i) small and meduim sized enterprises; and (ii) Foreign Direct Investment businesses.

(AQW 3370/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011, 87% of offers made by Invest NI, representing 27% of total assistance offered, was to (i) small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

During the same time period, 7% of offers made and 44% of assistance offered was to (ii) inward investment businesses. The table below shows the breakdown of offers made in each category over the period.

INVEST NI OFFERS BY OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESS SIZE (2010-11)

Ownership	Company Size	Number of Offers	% of Total Offers	Total Assistance (£m)	% of Total Assistance
External	Large	239	7%	46.96	44%
	External Total	**239**	**7%**	**46.96**	**44%**
Local	Large	106	3%	15.85	15%
	SME	2,820	87%	29.11	27%
	EDO/UNI	61	2%	15.89	15%
	Local Total	**2,987**	**93%**	**60.85**	**56%**
Total		**3,226**		**107.82**	

Notes:

1. 2% of offers were made to External Delivery Organisations (EDOs) and Universities (UNI) which cannot be classified by business size.
2. SMEs are defined as having less than 250 employees.
3. Totals may not add due to rounding.

In addition, during 2010/11 DCAL and NITB funded £621,317 to small and medium sized enterprises under the Events Funding Programme. This fund was administered by NITB and equates to 56% of the total allocation of £1,114,417 funding for grants.

Grants

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of grants allocated by her Department in 2011/12 to date went to (i) small and meduim sized enterprises; and (ii) Foreign Direct Investment businesses.

(AQW 3371/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between 1st April and 30th September 2011, 91% of offers made by Invest NI, representing 68% of total assistance offered, was to (i) small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

During the same time period, 6% of offers made and 25% of assistance offered was to (ii) inward investment businesses. The table below shows the breakdown of offers made in each category over the period.

INVEST NI OFFERS BY OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESS SIZE (APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2011-12)

Ownership	Company Size	Number of Offers	% of Total Offers	Total Assistance (£m)	% of Total Assistance
External	Large	109	6%	9.17	25%
	External Total	**109**	**6%**	**9.17**	**25%**
Local	Large	30	2%	0.49	1%
	SME	1,661	91%	25.31	68%
	EDO/UNI	20	1%	2.10	6%
	Local Total	**1,711**	**94%**	**27.89**	**75%**
Total		**1,820**		**37.07**	

NOTES:

4. 1% of offers were made to External Delivery Organisations (EDOs) and Universities (UNI) which cannot be classified by business size.
5. SMEs are defined as having less than 250 employees.
6. Totals may not add due to rounding.
7. Figures are provisional and may be subject to change.

In addition to the above, during 2011/12, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board funded £551,000 to small and medium sized enterprises under the Tourism Events Funding Programme. And, in October 2011, DETI's Telecoms Policy Unit allocated £215,432 of support under its NI Broadband Fund to North West Electronics, a local SME, to deliver fixed wireless access distribution in the North Eastern and Southern areas of Northern Ireland.

Invest NI: Funding for Non-indigenous Businesses

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list all the non-indigenous businesses which received funding from InvestNI in the last five years and have since closed or withdrawn; and to detail the amount of funding each of these businesses received.

(AQW 3372/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the period 1st April 2006 and 31st March 2011 Invest NI offered assistance totalling over £1.4m to 12 non-indigenous businesses that have subsequently ceased trading. The table below lists these businesses and the amount of assistance each was offered.

Businesses Offered Invest NI Assistance between 2006-07 and 2010-11 that have since closed

Business Name	Total Assistance Received (£) 2006-07 - 2010-11
Axellis Medical Technologies Limited	249,361
Fighting Bull Broadcast Technologies Limited	129,598
Galfees NI Ltd	3,128
Hughes Christensen	916,972
Huhtamaki (Uk) Ltd (Portadown)	4,200
Infineer Ltd	1,950
John Crane UK Ltd	2,400

Business Name	Total Assistance Received (£) 2006-07 - 2010-11
Metso Minerals (Cappagh) Limited	85,449
Mobile Cohesion Limited	11,801
Nambarrie Tea Company Ltd	2,195
Tyco Healthcare (Uk) Manufacturing Ltd	400
Visteon UK Ltd	240
Total	**1,407,694**

NOTE: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

It should be noted that Invest NI grant support is offered at the start of a project based on a company commitment to deliver a specific set of project based targets. In certain instances the company may not be able to fully deliver on these targets; therefore, not all of the assistance offered by Invest NI will be paid to the company.

Projects are monitored against performance and investment targets and in those cases where a company fails to either undertake the project as agreed or maintain the capital investment or employment numbers against which grant assistance has been paid, Invest NI will seek repayment of grant.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: Contact

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the nature of any contact her Department has had with the Department of Business Innovation and Skills during this mandate where the subject matter was related to (i) Directive 200/35/EC; (ii) Directive 2011/7/EU; or (iii) the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 as amended.

(AQW 3375/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During this mandate, my Department has been in contact with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills on one occasion. This was to confirm details included in my answer to Assembly Question 3071/11.

Electricity Rebate

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he has any plans to introduce an equivalent of the £120 electricity rebate which is available in England, Scotland and Wales, and if so, what form this equivalent scheme might take.

(AQW 3386/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Warm Homes Discount Scheme, which came into operation in Great Britain on 1 April 2011, is akin to a social tariff. As such, the full implications of introducing such a scheme in Northern Ireland would need to be endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive. Aside from requiring legislation, careful consideration would also have to be given to the proportion of customers to benefit from such a scheme and which customers would pay more as a result.

However, I am aware that OFMDFM Ministers are currently considering the prioritisation of a number of applications to the Executive's Social Protection Fund, one of which includes a fuel poverty initiative from my colleague Nelson McCausland.

Directive 2011/7/EU

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what form of consultation will be carried out by her Department prior to the final transposition date for Directive 2011/7/EU; and when details of the consultation will be announced.

(AQW 3399/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Arrangements for the implementation of Directive 2011/7/EU, including any associated consultation, are being taken forward by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). As normal, I will seek to ensure that interested parties in Northern Ireland are included in any future consultation exercise, details of which are not yet available. New or amending legislation made at Westminster resulting from the Directive will be extended to Northern Ireland.

Warm Homes Discount Scheme

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what consideration he has given to the Warm Homes Discount Scheme available in England, Scotland and Wales; and (ii) whether he intends to introduce a similar scheme to protect and meet the needs of vulnerable people.

(AQW 3412/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Warm Homes Discount Scheme is a Great Britain initiative aimed at helping low income and vulnerable groups with energy costs. The scheme, which is akin to a social tariff, does not apply in Northern Ireland.

The full implications of introducing such a scheme in Northern Ireland would need to be endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive. Aside from requiring legislation, careful consideration would also have to be given to the proportion of customers to benefit from such a scheme and which customers would pay more as a result.

However, I am aware that OFMDFM Ministers are currently considering the prioritisation of a number of applications to the Executive's Social Protection Fund, one of which includes a fuel poverty initiative from my colleague Nelson McCausland.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created as a result of investment from InvestNI in Foreign Direct Investment in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3434/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the number of jobs expected to be created, which are described as 'Jobs Promoted', by inward investors that had an offer of assistance approved by Invest NI between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2011, broken down by financial year. This represents the number of jobs that investors plan to create over the lifetime of assisted projects.

INWARD INVESTMENT JOBS PROMOTED BY INVEST NI (2006-07 TO 2010-11)

Financial Year	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	Total
Jobs Promoted	3,374	2,675	2,951	1,766	2,816	13,582

NOTES:

1. Jobs promoted represent the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.
2. Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans InvestNI has to attract Foreign Direct Investment to South Antrim.

(AQW 3447/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Inward investment plays a large part in the economic growth of Northern Ireland and Invest NI has a very successful track record of attracting high quality investment which will benefit the whole of the region. Invest NI is building on this success by working closely with local stakeholders to maximise investment and employment opportunities in all areas.

Securing inward investor visits is a key part of the long-term objective of securing inward investment and employment opportunities. The objective of an inward investor visit, as part of the overall sales process, is to demonstrate to the visiting company how locating in Northern Ireland will help its business to grow and thrive. Invest NI works closely with the company to develop a programme which is driven by the specific requirements of the company and the potential project.

Whilst Invest NI does offer guidance, it must be stressed that it is the potential inward investor's decision on what it would like to see on its inward visit programme itinerary. This may be based upon a number of factors, some of which are outside my Department's immediate control, including population size and availability of skills and workforce, transport links, availability of property and the presence of existing sectoral clusters within Northern Ireland.

In addition, it would be hugely detrimental to the chances of securing foreign direct investment (FDI) for Northern Ireland if Invest NI was to propose visit locations that do not meet the company's specific requests and requirements. In fact, the Independent Review of Economic Policy recognised the importance of government policy not seeking to unduly influence the location of FDI within NI, stating that it is important to allow companies the scope to locate where they can operate most profitably.

It should be noted that Invest NI sells Northern Ireland as a region capable of meeting the needs of a potential inward investor. It competes for FDI in a crowded marketplace and its competitors are generally larger country-states (e.g. Republic of Ireland, Scotland, France, etc).

My Department, including Invest NI, is aware of the challenges facing local areas in Northern Ireland and we will continue to work closely with councils and other local stakeholders to review the features and benefits of each local area in order to maximise opportunities for economic growth for all areas.

For example, Invest NI's North Eastern Regional Office (which covers North Antrim PCA), in conjunction with colleagues in International Investment Division is currently delivering a series of presentations to each Council in the region aimed at providing information as to the types of projects that are currently considered internationally mobile, the sectors Invest NI is targeting and what possible investors are looking for in a location. A joint presentation to Newtownabbey and Antrim borough councils on this issue is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 16th November 2011.

In addition, Invest NI plans to develop a smartphone application ('FDI app') which will help raise Northern Ireland's profile within international markets and be used as a tool to help promote the benefits of setting up in the region to potential investors. The app will present the regions' key selling messages and relevant data in a format that is current, easily accessible, easy to read and easily updated. Presenting key selling messages in this innovative manner will help Northern Ireland differentiate itself from other competing regions. Whilst initially this will focus on Northern Ireland as a region, it is anticipated that the idea be rolled out to interested councils.

Properties Suitable for Foreign Investment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2733/11-15, how many properties, which are suitable and available for foreign investment, exist within each parliamentary constituency according to InvestNI.

(AQW 3465/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Businesses seeking to invest in Northern Ireland, whether they are indigenous or foreign direct, will have specific property requirements which are unique to their particular needs.

It is important therefore to provide potential investors with a variety and choice of property offerings. Invest NI provides qualifying businesses with bespoke property searches tailored to their specific requirements to present them with a range of innovative solutions.

Invest NI also maintains a database which contains details of a range of available properties, both private and public sector, across Northern Ireland. This can be accessed through the NIBusinessInfo web portal.

Whilst the information contained within the database cannot be provided in the format of parliamentary constituency, it does offer details of availability within each Council area. The bespoke search may also bring forward other options to meet the company's specific needs and timescales.

Biomass District Heating System in Camphill Community

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much grant aid has been awarded to help fund the installation of a Biomass District Heating System in Camphill Community, Glencraig; and whether all this money has been paid out.

(AQW 3467/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Camphill Community at Glencraig were awarded grant assistance of up to £500k by the Department of Energy and Climate Change to install their biomass district heating.

There has been no funding from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Biomass District Heating System in Camphill Community

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she is aware of any dispute between the project administrators of the Camphill Community Biomass District Heating scheme and the contractor who completed the works.

(AQW 3469/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My officials have taken some interest in the Camphill project, because at 1MW it is a sizeable biomass plant. Recent contact indicates that the plant is complete and operating satisfactorily. We are not aware of any dispute between the Camphill administrators and the contractor.

Biomass District Heating System in Camphill Community

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there has been an official opening of the Camphill Community Biomass District Heating scheme.

(AQW 3470/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In December 2010 I visited the Camphill Community at Glencraig to congratulate them on the receipt of their award from the Department of Energy and Climate Change. This was an achievement in itself as they were only one of 12 awards made across the UK. When I was there I agreed to lay a foundation stone in the building which was to house the biomass plant.

I understand the project is now complete but I am not aware of an official opening having taken place.

Cost of Equality Schemes

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the cost to her Department of equality schemes since the publication of 'Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' by the Equality Commission in May 2007.

(AQW 3504/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department has spent £1,250 on an Audit of Inequalities.

Loyal Order Events: Promotion

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money has been spent by (i) the Tourist Board; and (ii) Tourism Ireland on the promotion of Loyal Order related events in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3524/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Both NITB and Tourism Ireland provide the opportunity for Loyal Order related events to be featured on their websites. Both organisations have also provided advice and guidance to organisers on how to maximise the tourism potential of their events. It is not possible to measure this support in financial terms.

Gaelic Games Events: Promotion

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money has been spent by (i) the Tourist Board; and (ii) Tourism Ireland on the promotion of Gaelic Games related events in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3525/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Both NITB and Tourism Ireland provide the opportunity for Gaelic Games related events to be featured on their websites. Both organisations have also provided advice and guidance to organisers on how to maximise the tourism potential of their events. It is not possible to measure this support in financial terms.

Gaelic Games: Tourist Potential

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what analysis the Tourist Board carried out of the University of Ulster report into the potential of Gaelic Games tourism; and for her assessment of the findings in this report.

(AQW 3526/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The report was completed August 2006, five and half years ago.

In July 2011 the GAA met with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and together they have outlined areas where the two organisations can work together for the benefit of Northern Ireland tourism.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3607/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The travel costs incurred for the year 2010/11 (the last 12 month period for which figures are available) were:

Minister	Departmental Officials
£27,767	£397,137

Feed-in Tariff Scheme for Renewable Energy

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she intends to introduce a Feed-In Tariff scheme similar to the scheme in Britain, where householders who install renewable energy technologies can receive up to 41 pence for every unit of electricity they generate.

(AQW 3613/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department plans to take the powers for a small scale Feed-In Tariff (FIT) as part of the Energy Bill which is presently in development. This would allow a FIT to be in place as early as 2014/15 however the date of implementation will have to be set in the context of the wider Coalition Government Electricity Market Reform proposals which I am still considering. The Department of Energy and Climate Change is shortly due to publish a consultation on a review of FIT tariffs for small scale solar photovoltaic technology.

Foyle: Jobs Promoted

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2925-11-15, in relation to the 297 jobs promoted in Foyle, to detail (i) the companies involved; (ii) the number of jobs created in each company; (iii) how many of these jobs currently exist, broken down by (a) full-time and part-time positions; and (b) permanent and temporary positions.

(AQW 3657/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The previous answer to AQW 2925-11-15 detailed the number of jobs promoted in the Foyle Parliamentary Constituency Area in 2010-11. Rigney Dolphin were the sole company responsible for promoting the full 297 jobs, which they aim to create by 2013. To date 50 of these jobs have been created all of which are on a permanent full-time basis.

Gas Network

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the continual increasing cost of gas, why her Department continues to prioritise expanding the gas network over maximising the opportunity for renewables.

(AQW 3662/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Natural gas is the least polluting fossil fuel, and is now available to some 150,000 energy consumers in Northern Ireland, mostly in the Greater Belfast area.

While retail gas tariffs have increased in recent months as a result of increases in wholesale energy market prices, natural gas continues to offer consumers cost benefits over heating oil.

I therefore consider that natural gas continues to provide fuel choice for consumers, and that this choice should be extended, where it is economically viable, to other areas in Northern Ireland. You will be aware that my Department has recently consulted on gas network extension, and I am keen to explore how gas infrastructure can also be utilised for bio-gas.

The extension of the gas network and the incentivisation of the renewable heat market will support the development of a more secure, sustainable and diverse heat market which isn't overly reliant on one particular fuel and provides greater choice for consumers and businesses.

Renewable Heat Incentive

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the £25m from the UK Government for the Renewable Heat Incentive is guaranteed regardless of any change in UK Government policy.

(AQW 3718/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Funding of £25m has been allocated to DETI, from Her Majesty's Treasury, for the development of a Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive. My Department is working to ensure

that this funding is utilised in the most appropriate way to develop and incentivise the Northern Ireland renewable heat market. I am unaware of any change in UK Government policy that would impact on this funding.

Smart Meters

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's work with the Utility Regulator to develop a cost-effective smart metering solution.

(AQW 3721/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is working with the Utility Regulator on the development of a cost benefit analysis for smart metering in Northern Ireland. The EU Third Internal Energy Package (IME 3) requires a cost benefit analysis on intelligent metering to be completed by September 2012.

At present we are on target to complete the cost benefit analysis at the beginning of 2012. Once I receive, and have considered, the completed cost benefit analysis I will announce my policy position on smart metering as early as possible in the New Year.

In the meantime however the Utility Regulator has two small smart meter trials in their early stages. These focus on technology and smart grid application, and, customer behaviour and education, with a specific focus on how smart meters could help customers vulnerable to fuel poverty.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on encouraging greater scope for Combined Heat and Power.

(AQW 3723/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Combined Heat and Power (CHP) is an efficient method of electricity and heat generation and my Department is keen to see its use optimised in Northern Ireland.

There are a number of support mechanisms to encourage the uptake of CHP. These are:

a) exemption from the Climate Change Levy for electricity generated by a CHP plant and in some cases, exemption from the Climate Change Levy for the input fuel to a CHP plant;

b) preferential treatment leading to a reduction in business rates for CHP plants;

c) Enhanced Capital Allowances which enable a business to claim 100% first-year capital allowances on their spending on CHP plants; and

d) support through the Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation for renewable fuelled CHP plants.

In addition, the department has consulted this year on the potential to give CHP priority dispatch to the grid and DETI aims to have these regulations made by the end of the year.

Loans and Finance Provided by Invest NI to Gas and Oil Companies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any loans and finance provided to oil or gas companies by InvestNI in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3724/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has not provided any loans or grants to oil and gas companies in the past 5 years.

Planning Application T/2010/0238

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of her Department's remit to promote renewable energy development and an increase in the amount of electricity generated

from renewable sources, to outline her Department's position on planning application T/2010/0238 for a lignite extraction facility in Crumlin, County Antrim.

(AQW 3738/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Electricity generated from lignite would not be considered renewable energy and therefore would not help to meet targets in the Strategic Framework.

The Geological Survey as statutory consultee, has commented on the planning application and advised that a full assessment of the geology is required to understand the possible impact such a development might have on groundwater or surface waters.

Geological Survey also advised that such a development would require a mining licence under legislation. My Department is not in receipt of such an application.

Connecting Europe Facility: Energy and Broadband

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she plans to maximise the benefits to the local community following the announcement of significant funding for energy and broadband by the European Commission as part of the Connecting Europe Facility.

(AQW 3742/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On 19 October 2011, as one of its considerations under the Multi-Annual Financial Framework for the period 2014-2020, the European Commission announced proposals for a Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) under which it will provide up to €50billion of support for trans-European network development in the areas of transport, energy and telecommunications. The initiative is still at proposal stage pending approval by the European Parliament and European Council of Ministers. As such, a final decision on what form the support will take, how it will be distributed and what allocation, if any, Member States will receive, has yet to be taken. I am not, therefore, currently in a position to suggest how the benefits of the initiative will be maximised

The impact of the CEF will be considered further as discussions between relevant Northern Ireland bodies and the European Commission are progressed with regard to the 2014-2020 funding programmes.

Shale Production

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she can give a guarantee that no shale production will be allowed to take place before an environmental impact assessment has been carried out.

(AQW 3794/11-15)

Mrs Foster: If a company applies to develop petroleum or natural gas resources (including shale gas) they will be required to seek permission from my Department and other regulatory authorities, including the Department of the Environment (DOE).

DOE has primary legislative authority and responsibility in Northern Ireland for environmental protection and will determine whether the shale gas production proposed requires an Environmental Impact Assessment. To date no application for any such development has been received.

DETI's approval of an oil or gas development programme is subject to the licensee meeting all statutory requirements including avoidance of damage to the environment.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will introduce legislation to ensure that companies who undertake hydraulic fracturing publish a list of the chemicals that will be used in the process.

(AQW 3796/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has no plans to introduce legislation to ensure that companies who undertake hydraulic fracturing publish a list of the chemicals that will be used in the process. Such information would be required as an integral part of the Environmental Impact Statement accompanying an application for planning permission to carry out drilling and associated hydraulic fracturing operations.

Rihanna Music Video

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any money was spent by the Tourist Board or her Department in attracting or facilitating the company which produced the Rihanna music video, which was filmed in Northern Ireland; and if so, to detail the amount spent and on what it was spent.

(AQW 3797/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No money was spent by DETI, NITB or Tourism Ireland in attracting or facilitating the company which produced the Rihanna music video filmed in Northern Ireland.

Planning Application T/2010/0238

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of her Department's commitment to National and European legislative targets for renewable energy provision, to outline her Department's position on planning application T/2010/0238 for a lignite extraction facility in Crumlin, County Antrim.

(AQW 3798/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Electricity generated from lignite would not be considered renewable energy and therefore would not help to meet National and European legislative targets for renewable energy provision.

The Geological Survey as statutory consultee, has commented on the planning application and advised that a full assessment of the geology is required to understand the possible impact such a development might have on groundwater or surface waters.

Geological Survey also advised that such a development would require a mining licence under legislation. My Department is not in receipt of such an application.

Wind Power

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the possibilities for harnessing wind power for the electricity grid.

(AQW 3806/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI is currently consulting on a draft Onshore Renewable Electricity Strategic Action Plan which examines the role of all onshore renewable electricity technologies including onshore wind, biomass and other technologies (such as geothermal, photovoltaic and hydro) in meeting the Executive's 40% renewable electricity target by 2020.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Onshore Renewable Electricity Action Plan, has examined low and high levels of onshore wind, biomass and other technologies to give us an indication of potential renewable energy mixes at 2020. On shore wind has the potential to contribute between 800-1200MW of installed capacity by 2020, but this is subject to adequate grid reinforcement being in place.

In addition the Off Shore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan identified that off shore wind has the potential to contribute up to 900MW of installed capacity by 2020, subject to adequate grid reinforcement being in place.

Planning Application T/2010/0238

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the current moratorium on prospecting licences, to outline her Department's position on planning application T/2010/0238 for a lignite extraction facility.

(AQW 3872/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Strategic Energy Framework 2010 undertakes to keep a watching brief on any future role that indigenous fuel sources such as lignite might play, bearing in mind the associated environmental issues. Whilst the lignite moratorium applies only to prospecting in Northern Ireland, any extraction of lignite would require a Mining Licence from my Department in addition to planning permission.

My Department considers applications for Mining Licences on a case-by-case basis, taking into account a wide range of social, economic and environmental factors and undertaking a wide consultation process before coming to a decision. My Department is not in receipt of such an application for extraction of lignite in the Crumlin area.

Department of the Environment

Surplus Land in North Down Owned by the Department

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to list any surplus land in the North Down area owned by his Department.

(AQW 2155/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Department owns and manages Crawfordsburn Country Park and Redburn Country Park both of which are in the North Down constituency area. In addition, the Department also owns sections of land known as the North Down Coastal Path. There are no surplus lands associated with the country parks referred to above.

In relation to the North Down Coastal Path, while none of the land is deemed to be surplus, it is the intention of the Department to transfer those sections of the path in its ownership lying outside the boundaries of Crawfordsburn Country Park to North Down Borough Council which is better placed to manage them.

Blue Flag Status of Beaches

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on dealing with dirty beaches to meet the Blue Flag status.

(AQW 2670/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The quality of our beaches is an area that I am taking an active interest in, because I believe that the general condition of our bathing beaches has a connection to the economic well being of many of our coastal communities. I am determined to seek opportunities in the continuing campaign to maintain and improve all aspects of beach quality.

To date, I have hosted two Good Beach Summits and a third is scheduled for December 2011. I called together key representatives from all of the coastal councils, government departments and agencies, coastal community groups and environmental lobby groups to draw up an Action Plan for the protection and improvement of our beaches. I am tracking the delivery of this Action Plan. Pollution control is not the only important aspect of protection of the environment. Improving aesthetic standards through litter control can also have real economic benefits.

Implementation of the Good Beach Action Plan is improving co-operation between organisations, agencies and the public in achieving our shared goal of clean beaches.

The Blue Flag Award Scheme is operated by Tidy Northern Ireland and water quality is the primary criteria for eligibility. Other beach management criteria include car parking, disabled access, toilet facilities, waste collection facilities, environmental education, signage and life guard or life saving equipment provision. I will be writing to all bathing water operators to encourage their participation in the various beach award schemes.

This year bathing water quality in Northern Ireland was the best for at least 15 years. All 24 of our identified bathing waters passed the mandatory standards of the EC Bathing Waters Directive. In addition 20 of these passed at the higher guideline standards and would, on the basis of water quality alone, be eligible to apply for the coveted Blue Flag. However, not all may satisfy the other management and facilities orientated criteria.

As you may know, Ballyholme bathing water has failed to achieve the mandatory standards of the EC Directive in 5 of the last 10 years, but it was successful in meeting the standards this year. It is probable that the significant water quality related investments by both Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and the agriculture industry are now paying off. With continued vigilance I hope that the standard will be maintained and perhaps even improved next year.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 gives local councils new powers to deal with litter and other problems that blight our communities. The Department is now advancing a Marine Litter Strategy which will address the litter which impacts on parts of our coast from all of its various sources.

I am convinced that the multi-faceted Action Plan, combined with the partnership approach, is a key way to overcome the pollution problems that have an adverse affect on some parts of our wonderful coast.

There is no room for complacency as the standards to achieve Blue Flag status will be changing in the forthcoming years. The EU has introduced a revision to the existing Bathing Water Directive which tightens compliance standards for 2015. This means that the standard for Blue Flag will be even harder to achieve in the future.

Environmental Damage Caused by Fuel Laundering

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) how many local Councils have cleaned up environmental damage caused by fuel laundering; and (ii) the costs incurred by each local Council.

(AQW 2804/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As the Department has no legislative control over specific elements of District Council (DC) budgets, my officials do not maintain details of clean up costs for individual waste streams incurred by each DC. Correspondence between NIEA and Councils and their representatives would support the view that the Councils facing the greatest financial burden are those along the southern border with the Republic of Ireland, i.e. Newry and Mourne, Armagh, Dungannon and Fermanagh. I have asked the councils to provide the information.

Enforcement Notices Illegal Developments: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of Enforcement Notices issued for illegal developments in the North Down area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2809/11-15)

Mr Attwood: No planning enforcement notices have been served in the North Down Area served in each of the last three years. I am looking further at the situation in North Down and generally.

Victims of Domestic Violence within his Department

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment what work place policies are in place to assist victims of domestic violence within his Department and its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 2896/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A NICS wide Workplace Policy for Domestic Violence and Abuse covers employees in all Government Departments including DOE staff. This policy explains how help and support can be provided for individuals experiencing domestic violence, how to identify domestic violence, role of the line manager and available support services.

DOE has two arm's – length bodies; the Northern Ireland Local Government Officer's Superannuation Scheme (NILGOSC) and the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC). This Department has no direct responsibility for Human Resource management within these bodies and neither has a specific Workplace Policy for Domestic Violence in place. However, I can inform you that I have asked that this policy is brought to the attention of both organisations and advised that it should be complied with.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil and Public Servant Salaries

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of civil and public servants whose annual salary is in excess of (a) £100,000; (b) £150,000; and (c) £200,000; and (ii) the Government organisations for which they work.

(AQW 2566/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The number of civil servants in NICS Government Departments whose annual salary is in excess of (a) £100,000 is 20; (b) £150,000 is 5; and (c) £200,000 is nil.

The number of public servants whose annual salary is in excess of (a) £100,000 is 217; (b) £150,000 is 4; and (c) £200,000 is nil; and the Government organisations for which they work are detailed.

- National Museums Northern Ireland
- Belfast Education & Library Board
- Western Education & Library Board
- Office of Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal
- Invest Northern Ireland
- Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
- South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust
- Western Health & Social Care Trust
- Northern Health & Social Care Trust
- Southern Health & Social Care Trust
- Health & Social Care Board
- Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency
- Public Health Agency
- Business Services Organisation
- Regulatory Quality Improvement Authority
- Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service
- PSNI
- State Pathology
- Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
- Police Ombudsman
- Northern Ireland Water
- Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company / Translink
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Strategic Investment Board

This response is derived from collated part inputs supplied by each Department. DHSSPS has confirmed that their response relates to basic pay and does not include additional payments such as clinical excellence awards payable to medical and dental consultants.

Criminal Injury Compensation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the judgement in McKeever-v-MOD, if he will urgently review the civil law to bring it into line with the law governing criminal injury compensation so that a plaintiff with a relevant conviction will be prohibited from obtaining full compensation.

(AQW 3070/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are exclusions from compensation and grounds for reducing compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Schemes and Criminal Injuries legislation, which do not apply to claims for compensation brought under the common law. There are also grounds for reduction which do apply at common law which also apply under the Schemes, such as contributory negligence. In addition, at common law, compensation can be excluded on grounds which do not apply under the Schemes, for example, public policy and where a plaintiff has placed himself at risk through his own wrongful act ("ex turpi causa non oritur actio"). I will carefully consider the recent decision and its implications.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any easements that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3264/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer you to my statement to the Assembly on 24th October which includes details of the easements identified by my Department during the October monitoring round.

Domestic Properties

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the current number of domestic properties, and of these, how many are (a) unoccupied; and (b) occupied; and (ii) the level of revenue generated from the rates of (a) unoccupied; and (b) occupied houses in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3380/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As at 16th October 2011 there were 759,296domestic properties of which 36,975 were unoccupied and 722,321 were occupied.

Prior to 1st October 2011 rates were not payable on Unoccupied Domestic properties which LPS classify as 'Vacant'.

The level of revenue generated has been interpreted as the actual cash receipts from domestic occupancies in each of the years 2009/10 (the earliest year for which comparable information is available), and 2010/11 (the latest year for which comparable information is available).

The table below provides information on the amount of cash receipts received from domestic occupancies in 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Year	**2009/10**	**2010/11**
Cash Receipts	£460,178,255	£484,850,951

Departmental Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3498/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department does not require its financial data to be categorised geographically in order to effectively manage its operations. Consequently, it is not possible to answer this question without incurring disproportionate costs.

Public Sector Employees

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many public sector employees have been based in Co.Fermanagh in each of the last seven years.

(AQW 3515/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide an estimate of the number of public sector employees that have been based in County Fermanagh in each of the last seven years. However, the table overleaf provides the numbers of public and private sector jobs in Fermanagh District Council as measured by the biennial Census of Employment.

TABLE 1: NORTHERN IRELAND EMPLOYEE JOBS IN FERMANAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL (BIENNIAL)

Period	Public Sector	Private Sector*	Totals	Public Sector %
2009	5,436	15,409	20,845	26%
2007	5,710	15,885	21,595	26%
2005	5,416	14,811	20,227	27%
2003	5,614	13,727	19,341	29%
2001	5,539	13,037	18,576	30%

Source: NI Census of Employment, September 2001 - 2009

*Figures exclude agriculture but include animal husbandry service activities and hunting, trapping and game propagation.

Rates

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department received in rates in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 3612/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The amount received in rates has been interpreted as the actual cash receipts net of refunds in the financial year 2010/11.

In the financial year 2010/11 there was a total of £1,020.9 million actual cash receipts net of refunds received by LPS as published in the LPS Annual Report & Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2011.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3694/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Financial information for the Department is held on the basis of financial years; the last financial year ran from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011.

(i) The travel costs incurred by the Minister for the 2010-11 financial year were £208.80.

(ii) The travel costs incurred by departmental officials for the 2010-11 financial year were £1,370,649.

Divorces

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of divorces that have been finalised in each of the last two years.

(AQW 3703/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In 2009, there were 2,176 Decree Absolutes divorces registered in Northern Ireland. The corresponding figure for 2010[P] was 2,600 Decree Absolutes divorces.

P 2010 data is provisional until the publication of the 2010 Annual Report of the Registrar General due to be released in November 2011.

Unfunded Pressures Flowing from Inflation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in circumstances where the figures in the current budget are in cash terms, taking no account of inflation but were drawn up when inflation was 2-2.5 percent, what are the likely consequences in terms of unfunded pressures flowing from inflation now running above 5 percent; and to quantify those unfunded pressures in the 2011-2015 budget period if inflation continues at its present rate.

(AQW 3760/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Whilst the 2011-15 Budget document shows departmental allocations in cash terms, the impact of inflation was taken into account when departments submitted their spending proposals. Also, departmental Savings Delivery Plans reflect the savings required to allow departments to achieve their objectives within their Budget 2011-15 settlement and includes the impact of inflation.

The Consumer Price Index, which the Member refers to as being above 5 per cent, measures inflation for consumers and households. The local public sector is facing a very different set of costs. Therefore, the most appropriate measure of public sector inflation is the GDP deflator, which currently stands at 2.9 per cent.

It is important to recognise that the Executive can, to a large extent, exert control over the cost pressures facing it. One recent example was the surrender by my department in October Monitoring of funding in relation to accommodation costs as a result of lease re-negotiations. It is also important to note that construction sector tender costs have reduced as a result of the economic downturn.

Whilst Executive Ministers have already taken proactive actions to reduce costs, I recognise that in areas where costs are determined in global markets, such as energy, additional pressures may emerge. However, the evidence to date suggests that departments can deliver savings sufficient to address any such additional costs pressures.

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the recent decision by the Supreme Court, when he intends to bring forward a Commencement Order for the Damages (Asbestos-Related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQW 3848/11-15)

Mr Wilson: On 12 October 2011 the UK Supreme Court gave its judgment in relation to the challenge to the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) (Scotland) Act 2009. It ruled that the Act does not breach Article 1 of Protocol 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights and that it was, therefore, within the competence of the Scottish Parliament. The Court also rejected the challenge to the Act at common law.

The judgment applies to our legislation - the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 - as it largely follows the Scottish legislation. However, the insurers had also applied to the Northern Ireland High Court for leave to apply for judicial review of the 2011 Act. That application was adjourned, pending the outcome of the proceedings in the Supreme Court with regard to the

Scottish legislation. We are now seeking to establish what will happen to the application in the High Court, as this is relevant to the discussions regarding the commencement of our legislation.

Vacant Domestic Properties

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacant domestic properties, based on the rates records, in the (i) North Down Borough Council; and (ii) Ards Borough Council areas.

(AQW 3877/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The latest information available, as at 23rd October 2011, indicates that there are 466 vacant domestic properties in the North Down District Council area and 1,748 vacant domestic properties in the Ards District Council area.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners: Funds Held by

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) for an update on his plans to retrieve funds held by the Belfast Harbour Commissioners; and (ii) whether he has received confirmation that funds can be lawfully released under the framework under which the Commissioners operate.

(AQW 3915/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Firstly, the issue of seeking a contribution from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners is as a result of a decision by the Executive which the DRD Minister is taking forward.

The DRD Minister is currently pursuing the issue of a contribution from the reserves managed by the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. The DRD Minister will then report his recommendations to the Budget Review Group. Whatever he recommends will take account of the legal position regarding the Commissioners making such a contribution.

Rates

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why rates are continuing to annually increase, given the devaluation of house prices.

(AQW 3959/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At present the domestic rating system is based on individual capital values that were assessed using a fixed valuation date for all properties of 1 January 2005. This fixed date ensures that all properties are valued on a consistent basis, with subsequent fluctuations in market prices (both up and down) disregarded until the next general revaluation. Any properties built post 1 January 2005 continue to be valued at 1 January 2005 levels.

While I appreciate the concerns about rates liability, given the recent decline in the property market, a general revaluation would be required to update the property values on which rates are based. However, this simply involves a redistribution of the rating burden, it does not in itself change the total amount of money that needs to be raised to pay for essential public services and a general revaluation is always accompanied by a corresponding change in the tax rate (the rate in the pound).

So, if a general revaluation were to occur at this time only those properties that have reduced in value by more than the average would experience a reduction in rates liability, while properties experiencing lower than average falls in value would have an increased rates liability. There would be both winners and losers.

I believe that now would not be an appropriate time to begin a domestic general revaluation given the unsettled state of the housing market. As you will be aware I cancelled the non-domestic general revaluation in light of the continued economic downturn and instability in the property market. The market evidence for a new Valuation List was both inadequate and inconsistent. If the general revaluation had proceeded it would have fallen well short of international valuation standards. The

same issues are relevant to the domestic sector, while there is also an overriding need to maintain stability for the tax base.

In terms of annual rate increases the regional rate was cut in real terms for the last three years. For this year and the next three years it will be frozen in real terms. This means that rate bills are lower than they otherwise would have been. District rates are of course outside the control of the Executive.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Treatment Administered to EU Nationals

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any outstanding payments for hospital treatment administered to EU nationals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3387/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): EU nationals who are resident in Northern Ireland can be entitled to health service treatment as can those living in the Republic of Ireland but working in Northern Ireland. Under the EHIC system visitors from EU countries are entitled to healthcare which becomes necessary during their visit – the cost of this is reclaimed at UK level by the Department of Work and Pensions and figures for outstanding payments for treatment in Northern Ireland are not available.

Some EU nationals are treated by Trusts on a private basis and the table below shows outstanding payment information in this regard from those Trusts who were able to gather the information without excessive costs being incurred.

Trust	2006-07 (£)	2007-08 (£)	2008-09 (£)	2009-10 (£)	2010-11 (£)
Belfast	2,886	1,350	6,812	3,826	45,441
Northern	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Southern	D.C.	D.C.	D.C.	D.C.	D.C.
South Eastern	nil	nil	nil	nil	122
Western	D.C	D.C	D.C	275,000	345,000

D.C. = Only available at disproportionate cost

Appeal No: EA/2010/0155

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recent Tribunal decision, Appeal No: EA/2010/0155, to refuse his Department's appeal against the decision of the Information Commissioner contained in the Decision Notice of 11 August 2010, requiring the Department to disclose information to the Association of Catholic Lawyers of Ireland, when will his Department comply with the Information Commissioner's decision and thereby avert the threat of being in contempt of court.

(AQW 3397/11-15)

Mr Poots: Abortion statistics are not routinely published in Northern Ireland. Figures were however published on the number of abortions carried out in Northern Ireland for the years 2003 – 2007 in answer to AQW 2577/09.

The publication of these statistics prompted the Association of Catholic Lawyers of Ireland, to make a request under the Freedom of Information Act to the Department seeking further information on the abortions carried out in Northern Ireland between 2003 and 2007. The request was in nine parts, the first 2 parts (the disputed information) related to (i) the number of abortions carried out on women who

reside outside Northern Ireland and (ii) the number of women who had an abortion who reside in the Republic of Ireland. The Department responded that information was held on these two parts, however due to the small numbers involved the information was not suitable for release. The remaining seven parts of the request were in relation to the reasons that abortions were carried out, the gestational age at time of abortion and method of abortion, all of which the Department responded that information was not collected or held by the Department.

The Department issued the necessary refusal notice to the Association of Catholic Lawyers of Ireland indicating that it would not disclose the information and cited a number of reasons for doing so. The Department determined that the information was personal information and therefore not subject to disclosure; that the statistics were small in number and may lead to the patient or doctor being indentified, that the information could become known to third parties and that its disclosure would likely have a detrimental effect on the patient. The Department also took the view that it could not comply with the request because to do so would run contrary to its obligation to protect the confidentiality of patient information.

The Association of Catholic Lawyers took their request to the Information Commissioner for investigation, who concluded that the information requested should be released. The Department, in turn, lodged an appeal to the Information Tribunal against the Information Commissioners decision.

Given the fact that the High Court in England was hearing a very similar appeal case to that in Northern Ireland - Department of Health (DoH) –v- Information Commissioner (case reference CO/13544/2009) - regarding the release of abortion statistics in England, the Department approached the Information Tribunal and requested that the present case in Northern Ireland be stayed pending the High Court decision of the DoH case. The Tribunal agreed to this request.

On 5th October 2011 the Information Tribunal directed that the disputed statistics for Northern Ireland be released. The Department will comply with the Tribunal's decision and will release the information sought.

Free Prescriptions

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many free prescriptions were issued by GPs in each year between April 2006 and April 2010.

(AQW 3454/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available. Information about prescriptions is only collated by HSC Business Services Organisation once they have been dispensed and submitted for payment. Not all prescriptions issued are subsequently dispensed and submitted for payment, so the number of prescriptions issued by GPs, or any type of prescriber, is not known centrally.

Of those scripts presented to community pharmacies, the percentage of prescription items dispensed without charge at the point of dispensing is shown in table 1 below. These figures include items dispensed to patients exempt from charges, and to patients holding a pre-payment certificate.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF PRESCRIPTION ITEMS DISPENSED WITHOUT CHARGE AT THE POINT OF DISPENSING

Financial Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Percentage of prescription items dispensed without charge	94%	94%	95%	96%

Source: FPS, Information and Registration Unit, Business Services Organisation.

Minister's Overseas Trips

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how many overseas trips he has taken since taking up office; (ii) the destination; (iii) duration; (iv) purpose, of each trip; (v) the size of the party in attendance; and (vi) the total cost of each trip.

(AQW 3514/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) I have undertaken two overseas journeys on Ministerial business since taking up office;

(ii) Both of these journeys were to the United States of America; the first one focussing on New York and Washington DC; and the second based in the Boston area;

(iii) The first one was from 26 August to 1 September; and the second was from 17 to 21 October;

(iv) The purpose of the first visit was to meet with key suicide prevention experts, learn first-hand about their research findings and innovative programmes aimed at saving lives and discover how this can be applied in Northern Ireland; to meet with Nurse-Family Partnership practitioners in East Harlem where they are working to improve the health, well-being and self-sufficiency of young first-time parents and their children; to learn about the pioneering work in research, training and prevention carried out at the National Cancer Institute in Washington DC and the valuable links which it has forged with those working in cancer research and prevention in Northern Ireland. I was also there as Public Safety Minister to attend events and support our fire officers and police officers at the World Police and Fire Games in New York City.

The second visit was for the twin purpose of enhancing the health service in Northern Ireland and utilising technological know-how and business acumen to re-invest in the Northern Ireland economy. In fulfilment of this aim, I and those accompanying me, undertook a number of meetings with influential business leaders, academics and researchers, visited the University of Massachusetts Medical school, and met with the Northern Ireland Massachusetts Connection (a group dedicated to advancing business, research and clinical collaboration, between Massachusetts, Northern Ireland and Europe).

There have been a number of positive outcomes from this trip including:

- Established contacts with the U.S. Department of Commerce;
- Strengthened relations with the US Senate President in Boston;
- Announcement of the proposed Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment;
- Agreement to follow up on progress achieved with Northern Ireland business leaders who attended the exploration meeting in Boston;
- Agreement to explore opportunities for internship programmes between health care systems at home and in Boston;
- Established links with Finland and Catalonia through the Northern Ireland Massachusetts Connection programme to explore ways of sharing best practice; and
- Agreement to hold further discussions with health care companies in Boston.

It is my intention to make a Statement to the Assembly on progress on these matters in the near future.

(v) In the first instance I was accompanied by two people; in the second, I was accompanied by 5 people from the Department and one from the Public Health Agency.

(vi) The total cost to the Department of the first visit was £15,044.93

The total cost to the Department of the most recent visit is estimated at £16,400.00

October Monitoring Round: Easements

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any easements that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3545/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department did not identify any easements or reduced requirements in the October Monitoring Round.

Cost of Answering an Assembly Question

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average cost to his Department of answering (i) an Oral Assembly Question; and (ii) a Written Assembly Question during this mandate compared to two years ago.

(AQW 3549/11-15)

Mr Poots: DHSSPS does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and comparative information between mandates is therefore not available.

10-day Target for Payment of Invoices

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2224/11-14, to detail his Department's performance against the 95 percent payment target in (i) the financial year 2010/11; and (ii) the period 1 April 2011 to 31 August 2011; and to outline the reason for any failure to achieve the stated target.

(AQW 3577/11-15)

Mr Poots: In 2010-11, my Department paid 89% of its invoices within 30 days. This has increased to 92.4% in the period to 1 April 2011 to 31 August 2011.

The failure to achieve the 95% target is primarily attributable to the impact of invoice processing associated with RPA restructuring. I can advise that this process is almost complete and I anticipate this will further improve our prompt payment performance.

My Department is also implementing a range of other measures to improve prompt payment performance, which include maximising the use of Purchase Orders when ordering goods and services.

Prescribing Costs

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of his answer to the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety at Question Time when he referred to prescribing costs being £244 per head of population compared to England at £169 per head of population, to detail (i) the difference between prescribing costs and dispensing costs and (ii) the dispensing cost per head of population for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3583/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) Prescribing costs are defined as the ingredient costs, before discount, of all drugs prescribed and subsequently dispensed in the community by community pharmacists. Dispensing costs are defined as the prescribing costs plus fees paid by way of remuneration to community pharmacists as part of their professional practice for dispensing health service prescriptions.

(ii) Given the different administrative arrangements in operation across the UK, this information is not available in the form requested.

Prescribing Costs

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how prescribing costs can be attributed directly to pharmacies, when pharmacies have no direct input to the drugs being prescribed by GPs.

(AQW 3584/11-15)

Mr Poots: I recognise that community pharmacists have no direct control over what is prescribed as they are only permitted to dispense a medicine in accordance with the direction of a prescriber. However they do exert some influence over the cost of prescribed drugs, particularly generic medicines, through their procurement activities.

Autism Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to the pooling of departmental budgets to implement the Autism Strategy.

(AQW 3588/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has initiated work on the development of the cross-departmental Autism Strategy and is working in close collaboration with other Departments and stakeholder groups. The development of the strategy will include consideration of how resources can best be used to improve and enhance the range of services provided for those with autism and their families and carers.

Children Removed from the Care of Their Parents

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) under mental health legislation the circumstances in which children may be removed from the care of their parents; and (ii) under whose authority within the health and social care professions this may be recommended.

(AQW 3625/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 ("the Order"), there are no powers to remove a child from the care of its parents and to place the child in the care of social services. Such an order may only be made by the courts under Part V of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

However, a person may be detained in hospital if the following circumstances prevail:

a) he is suffering from mental disorder of a nature or degree which warrants his detention in a hospital for assessment (or for assessment followed by medical treatment); and

b) failure to so detain him would create a substantial likelihood of serious physical harm to himself or to other persons.

Detention may only occur following the submission of an appropriate report by a medical practitioner defined in the Order as "a fully registered person within the meaning of the Medical Act 1983".

Mental Health Legislation: Police Powers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what powers the police have, under mental health legislation, to make an arrest; and if this action must be based on a recommendation from a health professional.

(AQW 3626/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 the police have two powers of arrest.

Article 42 (10) provides:-

> *"If an accused person absconds from a hospital to which he has been remanded under this Article, or while being conveyed to or from that hospital, he may be arrested without warrant by any constable and shall, after being arrested, be brought as soon as practicable before the court that*

remanded him; and the court may thereupon terminate the remand and deal with him in any way in which it would have dealt with him if he had not been remanded under this Article".

Article 45(6) provides:-

"If an offender absconds from a hospital in which he is detained in pursuance of an interim hospital order, or while being conveyed to or from such a hospital, he may be arrested without warrant by a constable and shall, after being arrested, be brought as soon as practicable before the court that made the order; and the court may thereupon terminate the order and deal with him in any way in which it could have dealt with him if no such order had been made."

There is no requirement that the power of arrest must be based on a recommendation from a health professional.

Removal of Sectarian Tattoos

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been treated for the removal of sectarian tattoos in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3628/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of people who have been treated for the removal of sectarian tattoos in each Health and Social Care Trust is not collected by the Department.

MRI Scanner for the Clark Clinic in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3113/11-15 (i) how long it will take the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to complete the proposals for an MRI scanner for the Clark Clinic in The Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children; and (ii) when he expects a decision to be made.

(AQW 3633/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The Belfast Trust is currently developing initial proposals for this project to be submitted to my Department later in the year. Following consideration and approval of the initial proposals, the Trust would then be required to develop a more detailed Outline Business Case for consideration and approval. This is likely to take a further 6-9 months.

(ii) Once the business case is approved, I will be in a position to consider when the required funding can be accommodated within my constrained budgetary allocation.

Physiotherapy Graduates

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of junior physiotherapist posts in the Health Service; and (ii) what action his Department is taking to combat the levels of unemployment amongst physiotherapy graduates.

(AQW 3634/11-15)

Mr Poots: Newly qualified physiotherapists would normally enter employment within the Northern Ireland Health & Social Care Trusts at Agenda for Change (AfC) Band 5. The table below shows the Number of Physiotherapists employed at AfC Band 5 within Trusts at 30 September 2011.

	Sep-11	
Trust	**HC**	**WTE**
Belfast	60	60
Northern	52	47.16

Trust	Sep-11	
	HC	WTE
South Eastern	52	48.85
Southern	21	20.60
Western	24	22.60
Total	**209**	**199.21**

Notes: (i)HC = Headcount (ii)WTE = Whole-time Equivalent

Source: HSC Trusts

The overall vacancy headcount at 31 March 2011 for physiotherapists (not specifically junior physiotherapists) is 21. My Department carries out a cycle of workforce reviews for each clinical professional group, including physiotherapy. These reviews inform decisions on action to be taken in response to major changes impacting on supply/demand. For 2010/11, the number of student places commissioned was reduced by 10 to 59 and has remained at this level for 2011/12 to reflect both the current and projected level of demand for newly qualified physiotherapists. An update review of the allied health professions is ongoing.

Firefighters: Hot Fire Training

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can confirm that all firefighters have received hot fire training.

(AQW 3635/11-15)

Mr Poots: All firefighters receive regular training and assessment in the use of breathing apparatus and in simulated heat and smoke environments. Since 2007, all new recruits have additionally been trained using compartment fires which create real life fire conditions.

Firefighters: Hot Fire Training

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been allocated to ensure that all firefighters, wholetime and retained, receive hot fire training.

(AQW 3636/11-15)

Mr Poots: The NIFRS has advised me that it has set aside £27,000 this year for training aids to enable "Heat and Smoke" training and Compartmental Fire Familiarisation Training to take place and a further £13,500 for the rental of a dedicated site at Belfast International Airport.

Homeless Organisations: Funding

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department has allocated to homeless organisations in the 2011-15 budget period

(AQW 3642/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not directly provide funding for homeless organisations. However, funding is being provided to homeless organisations by the Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Trusts. The total amount of funding allocated to homeless organisations in the current financial year is £873,205. I am unable, at this time, to provide details of allocated future years funding.

Homeless Organisations in the Foyle Constituency: Funding

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department has allocated to homeless organisations in the Foyle constituency, in the 2011-15 budget period.

(AQW 3643/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not track the allocation of funding by District or City Council area, nor does my Department directly provide funding for homeless organisations. However, the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency have allocated a total of £311,527 in the current financial year to homeless organisations in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. The funding is primarily used to provide accommodation and support for homeless people with chronic alcohol difficulties. I am unable, at this time, to provide details of future years funding.

Homeless Organisations: Support

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any changes his Department, in conjunction with the Department for Social Development, are planning in the support of homeless organisations.

(AQW 3644/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department do not currently provide any support to homeless organisations.

Fire and Rescue Service: Cuts

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can offer an assurance that there will be no cuts to front-line services within the Fire and Rescue Service, particularly in the number of whole-time and retained firefighters and fire stations.

(AQW 3656/11-15)

Mr Poots: The effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue service provision are reviewed regularly by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. It issued a draft Integrated Risk Management Plan for public consultation on 26 October setting out proposals for service delivery for the period 2012 – 2015.

Erne Hospital: Old Equipment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the plans for the old equipment from the Erne Hospital when the new South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen, opens.

(AQW 3659/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Western Health and Social Care Trust are currently identifying equipment which can be transferred to the New Acute Hospital. Equipment that is not suitable for transfer will be subject of a review to determine whether the equipment could be used elsewhere by the Trust, donated for charitable purposes or safely and appropriately decommissioned.

Erne Hospital, Enniskillen: Wage Rate of Staff Required to "Act Up"

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can guarantee that staff at the Erne Hospital, Enniskillen, who are required to 'act up' will receive the equivalent wage rate.

(AQW 3660/11-15)

Mr Poots: This is a matter for individual employers but I am advised that the Trust has a "Temporary Movement to a Higher Payband/Acting up Policy" which is consistent with Agenda for Change terms and conditions and is applied in circumstances where staff are required to 'act up'.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Effective Internal Communication

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the size of Health and Social Care Trusts in relation to facilitation of effective internal communication.

(AQW 3661/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts are complex organisations, providing a wide range of different services and whose staff work out of a large number of different locations, dispersed geographically all around Northern Ireland. In the interests of service users and providing services as much as possible in communities and at locations which best meet the needs of service users this is going to continue to be the case.

Internal communication therefore presents a variety of challenges in these circumstances and Trusts deploy a wide range of approaches to support this including electronic communication, written communication and seminars, workshops and other events involving direct face to face communication to and between staff and groups of staff.

Evidence from inquiries and reviews across the UK have often highlighted issues of poor communication, within and between organisations, as a contributory factor in cases where service users have suffered adversely, because of failings in service delivery. Effective communication is therefore a priority area within all of our Health and Social Care organisations particularly with regard to sustaining and improving the quality of services and safeguarding patients and clients, and irrespective of the size of the organisation.

Cost of Prescriptions Issued and Dispensed

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of prescriptions issued and dispensed in each of the last three years, where one or more items could have been purchased over the counter at a low cost.

(AQW 3663/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Cost of Prescriptions Issued and Dispensed

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the total cost of prescriptions issued and dispensed to those exempt from prescription charges between 1 April 2007 to 1 April 2010; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of the cost within each exempt category.

(AQW 3664/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The cost of prescription items dispensed without charge at the point of dispensing is shown in table 1 below. These figures include items dispensed to patients exempt from charges, and to patients holding a pre-payment certificate. They also include items dispensed to patients who fraudulently claimed exemption from payment. Contraceptives, which were exempt from prescription charges for all patients, are included in the figures, as are items which did not attract a charge, such as stock items.

The cost given for each year is the ingredient cost before discount; this is the basic cost of the drug before the application of the sliding discount scale. The ingredient cost does not include other costs to the health service such as dispensing fees and other payments.

The figures shown are presented by the financial year in which the prescription was paid; it should be noted that there may be a time lag where prescriptions have been dispensed in a particular year but paid the following year.

TABLE 1: THE COST OF PRESCRIPTION ITEMS DISPENSED WITHOUT CHARGE AT THE POINT OF DISPENSING.

Financial Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
The cost of prescription items dispensed without charge	£367m	£378m	£406m

Source: FPS, Information and Registration Unit, Business Services Organisation.

Note: 1 The figures shown are for the total gross ingredient cost before discount.

(ii) The information requested is not available.

Prescription Charges: Annual Income

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual income of prescription charges in each year between 1 April 2007 and 1 April 2010.

(AQW 3665/11-15)

Mr Poots: The amount collected in respect of patient charges from prescriptions dispensed and presented for payment each year between 1 April 2007 and 1 April 2010 is shown in table 1 below. The figures include patient charges collected at the time of dispensing and patient charges in respect of pre-payment certificates. Pre payment certificates (PPCs) were purchased from community pharmacists and were valid for either a 4 month or 12 month period. PPCs covered a patient for repeat health service prescription charges if the patient was not entitled to free prescriptions. PPCs are no longer sold in Northern Ireland as the previous Health Minister abolished prescription charges on 1 April 2010.

It should be noted that the patient charge varied during the period in question. From April 2007 to December 2008 the charge was £6.85 per item; from January 2009 to March 2010 the charge was £3.00 per item.

Pre payment certificates cost £98.70 for a 12 month PPC or £35.85 for a 4 month PPC from April 2007 to December 2008; the cost was reduced to £25 for a 12 month PPC or £9 for a 4 month PPC from January 2009 to March 2010.

TABLE 1: THE AMOUNT COLLECTED IN RESPECT OF PATIENT CHARGES FROM PRESCRIPTIONS DISPENSED BY COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS OR DISPENSING DOCTORS AND PRESENTED FOR PAYMENT.

Financial Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Amount collected in respect of patient charges	£15.2m	£12.9m	£5.8m

Source: FPS, Information and Registration Unit, Business Services Organisation.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3695/11-15)

Mr Poots: The travel costs incurred by the Minister and departmental officials from 1 November 2010 to 28 October 2011 are as follows:

Minister	Departmental Officials
£6,667	£271,998

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Funding for Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how much funding has been allocated for (a) occupational therapy; and (b) speech therapy in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last five years; (ii) whether any of the funding went unspent, and, if so, how much; and (iii) whether any of the unspent funding was returned to his Department or re-allocated by the Trust.

(AQW 3725/11-15)

Mr Poots: Funding allocated for (a) occupational therapy and (b) speech therapy in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last five years is set out in the table below. No funding went unspent and no funding was returned to my Department.

Southern Health & Social Care Trust	Occupational Therapy £'000	Speech Therapy £'000
2007-08	5,595	2,303
2008-09	5,467	2,850
2009-10	5,877	3,122
2010-11	5,869	3,192
2011-12 (estimated)	5,900	3,250

Removal of Sectarian Tattoos

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how much each Health and Social Care Trust has spent on the removal of sectarian tattoos from patients in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3768/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available as expenditure on the removal of sectarian tattoos from patients is not collected by Health and Social Care Trusts.

Salary of Health Union Leader

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average annual salary of a health union leader.

(AQW 3783/11-15)

Mr Poots: The average annual salary of a health union leader is not a matter for my Department. Trade Union leaders are employed directly by the Trade Union that they are affiliated to and are remunerated by that organisation.

Salary of Health Union Leader

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much of a health union leader's salary is paid by his Department.

(AQW 3785/11-15)

Mr Poots: The annual salary of a health union leader is not a matter for my Department. Trade Union leaders are employed directly by the Trade Union that they are affiliated to and are remunerated wholly by that organisation.

Health Unions: Funding

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of funding that has been allocated to health unions in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 3787/11-15)

Mr Poots: This Department does not allocate funding to health unions. However, an annual contribution is made towards the costs associated with the running of a central Trade Union Office for the non-medical trade unions; this amounted to just over £82k in the 2010/11 financial year.

October Monitoring Round: Funding Allocation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he intends to spend the £5 million allocated to his department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3843/11-15)

Mr Poots: I submitted bids totalling £12m at October Monitoring. Of this £2m was for ICT pressures, particularly hand-held devices, with £10m intended to address a range of in-year pressures identified by Trusts including:

- Theatre upgrades at a number of hospital sites;
- Replacement of ultrasound, imaging and dialysis equipment;
- Patient transport vehicles;
- Purchase of medical devices.

In light of the bid outcome of £5m, I have asked Trusts to re-visit and re-prioritise their respective pressures in order to address the most pressing issues, taking account of procurement and approval lead-in times.

Post-traumatic Rape Syndrome

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in the last ten years have been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Rape Syndrome.

(AQW 3850/11-15)

Mr Poots: As Post-Traumatic Rape Syndrome is not a recognized medical/psychiatric condition, the figures you have requested are not available.

Prescriptions: Charges for Dosage Monitoring Systems

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether pharmacies have the authority to charge pensioners to have their prescriptions boxed on a monthly basis, and, if so, to detail the cost; and (ii) what measures are being taken to eliminate this charge.

(AQW 3857/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The actual provision of medicines by community pharmacies to patients in what are known as compliance trays or monitored dosage systems is not a HSC contracted service. Therefore the provision of this service is essentially an arrangement between the pharmacy and the patient or their representative.

(ii) I have noted the matter. However, due to the ongoing Judicial Review instigated by CPNI, I am unable to discuss matters pertaining to contractual arrangements with community pharmacy until the outcome of the hearing is known.

Smoking in Motor Vehicles

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to prohibiting smoking in motor vehicles.

(AQW 3883/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is intending to go out to public consultation next year on a range of options around the issue of banning smoking in private vehicles. Smoking in a work(s) vehicle is already banned under the provisions of the Smoke-free (Premises, Vehicle Operators and Penalty Notices) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007.

The consultation will include seeking views on how such a ban would be implemented and enforced. Officials have commenced preliminary discussions with relevant stakeholders to help in the development of a comprehensive consultation package.

Anti-TNF Drugs

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the announcement by the Minister of Finance and Personnel of additional funding for specialist drugs, what plans he has to extend the availability of anti-TNF drugs.

(AQW 3887/11-15)

Mr Poots: Access to anti-TNF drugs has improved significantly over recent years and there are currently more than 2,200 patients receiving anti-TNF and other biologic drugs for severe arthritis. The additional £5million in-year funding which I have secured will improve access to specialist drugs and treatments across a wide range of diseases and conditions. With regard to anti-TNF drugs, the funding will enable the HSC to begin to further reduce the waiting time for anti-TNF drugs for arthritis by starting up to 150 additional patients on treatment by the end of March 2012 and begin treatment for 30 patients currently on the waiting list for anti-TNF drugs for psoriasis.

This additional funding is only available to me in-year and further progress in extending the availability of anti-TNF drugs beyond March 2012 will therefore depend on the resources available to me after that.

UK Citizenship

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a citizen from the Republic of Ireland is eligible to claim citizenship of the UK after having been in a nursing home in Northern Ireland for five weeks, and is therefore entitled to free nursing care.

(AQW 3898/11-15)

Mr Poots: Paragraph 1 of Schedule 3 to the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 precludes services under Article 15 of the Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1922, i.e. General Social Welfare, to various categories of person. By paragraph 5 of that Schedule 3, a person is precluded from receiving general social welfare if he has the nationality of an EEA state other than the United Kingdom. By virtue of these provisions, therefore, citizens of the Republic of Ireland are precluded from receiving services under Article 15 of the 1972 Order. Paragraph 1 of Schedule 3 is subject to person's rights under European Convention of Human Rights or a person's rights under EU Treaties.

However, under regulation 14 of the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006, "the 2006 Regulations", EEA nationals have the right to reside in NI for longer than 3 months provided that they remain a 'qualified' person, as set out in regulation 6 of the Regulations. For as long as those individuals are qualified within the meaning of the 2006 Regulations and establish that they are "ordinarily resident" in Northern Ireland, ostensibly they are entitled to social care support, including the Payment for Nursing Care, subject to an assessment of their need. Not all those coming from EEA States will be (or become) "ordinarily resident". Each case depends on its individual facts, whether

there is a right to reside under the 2006 Regulations, an assessed need for services, ordinary residence and whether a refusal to provide services would breach EU Treaties or the ECHR.

Under regulation 15, such qualified EEA nationals have the right to reside permanently once they have resided in NI, in accordance with the 2006 Regulations, for a continuous period of 5 years. Once permanent residency is established, EEA nationals are, subject to an assessment of need, eligible to receive social care support including the Payment for Nursing Care.

However, it should be noted that there is no minimum period that an EU resident must be present in NI to receive social care support including the Payment for Nursing Care, where a refusal to provide such a service would involve a breach of an individual's rights under the ECHR or, in the case of qualified EEA nationals as defined under the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006, a breach of their rights under the Treaty for the Functioning of the EU.

Invest to Save Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the £15 million allocated in the October 2011 Monitoring Round to implement an Invest to Save scheme, which will facilitate a programme of redundancies, how many redundancies are expected and when.

(AQW 3902/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is expected that the £15m Invest to Save allocation in the 2011/12 financial year will facilitate approximately 200 voluntary redundancies, which will aid the reform and modernisation of service provision across Health and Social Care.

Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy Treatment

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the current number of people (a) diagnosed with cancer; and (b) receiving chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment; and (ii) whether his Department has made any projections for care planning, and if so, how many people with cancer might require treatment within the remainder of this Comprehensive Spending Review period.

(AQW 3905/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i)(a) The current number ofpeople diagnosed with cancer is not available. Figures from the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) show that the number of patients diagnosed with cancer between 1993 and 2009 in Northern Ireland (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer*) and who were still alive at the end of 2009 was 44,140. NICR started collecting data on cancer in 1993 so this may be an underestimate, as it would not include people diagnosed before this time. In 2009 there were 8,469 new cancer incidences (excluding NMSC*).
*ICD10 C00-C97 excluding C44. For a listing and explanation of ICD10 codes see International Classification of Diseases for Oncology, 3rd Edition, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 2000. Or online at http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/

(i)(b) The current number of people receiving chemotherapy and radiotherapy is not available. It should be noted that people with cancer may receive various combinations of radiotherapy, chemotherapy, surgery or other treatments. The Hospital Inpatient System (HIS) records that the total number of patients treated for a primary diagnosis of cancer as an inpatient or day case in 2010/11 was 21,308. However HIS does not hold information on patients treated in outpatient settings.

(ii) My Department has not made an assessment specifically of the number of people with cancer who might require treatment within the current Comprehensive Spending Review period. Section 3 of the Department's 'Regional Cancer Framework – A Cancer Control Framework' (2007) estimated that cancer incidence could increase by 30%-54% by 2025 depending on a number of factors and variables. The document is available on the Department's website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/csf-2.pdf.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the performance of each Health and Social Care Trust in meeting the Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Quality Standards; and (ii) what steps he intends to take to improve the services to patients.

(AQW 3909/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The information is not available.

(ii) In 2011/12, the HSC Board is investing an additional £1.5m in biologic therapies to make further progress with the implementation of NICE guidance for the treatment of Crohn's disease.

It is expected that by the end of 2011/12 HSC Trusts should have increased the number of IBD clinical nurse specialists so that there is 0.5WTE in each of the Northern, Southern, Western and South Eastern Trusts and 0.75 WTE in the Belfast HSC Trust that is 2.75WTE in total. This will provide an enhanced level of care for patients with severe inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Care System

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children who are currently in the formal care system (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by (a) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (b) constituency.

(AQW 3949/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest figures available indicate at 31 March 2011, 2,511 children were in the formal care system in Northern Ireland; these are detailed by HSC Trusts in Table 1 below for your information. Figures are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 1

CHILDREN IN THE FORMAL CARE SYSTEM BY HSC TRUST (31 MARCH 2011)

HSC Trust	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western
Number	622	579	503	407	400

Source: Health and Social Care Board Delegated Statutory Functions Monitoring Returns for 2010/11

The Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations Northern Ireland 2011

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when The Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations Northern Ireland 2011 will be brought before the Assembly.

(AQW 3958/11-15)

Mr Poots: The draft regulations to prohibit sales of tobacco products from vending machines are currently with the Executive for consideration and approval. Subject to Executive approval, I expect to bring the draft regulations before the Assembly in December.

Department of Justice

Prison Officers: Sick Leave

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2900/11-15, whether any of the 18 prison staff from HMP Maghaberry sustained injuries whilst on duty in Roe House that led to their sick leave; and if so, how many.

(AQW 3439/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): None of the 18 prison staff currently on sick absence due to incidents or assaults, sustained injuries during the course of their duties in Roe House.

Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1996

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to update the section of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 1996 relating to the reduction in sentences for defendants who plead guilty; and whether he will change paragraph 33 of Order so that it will read 'must take into account' rather than 'shall take into account'.

(AQW 3440/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have no immediate plans to amend the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (the 1996 Order).

However, subject to the views of the Justice Committee and the Executive, I hope shortly to publish a consultation paper on potential measures to encourage earlier guilty pleas. Through this paper, I intend to seek views on a range of options, some of which may require legislative change. As will be appreciated, it is important not to prejudge the consultation process and I wish to consider carefully the outcome of this exercise before deciding whether any amendments to the 1996 Order are required.

Finally, I do not propose to amend Article 33 as suggested. I am advised that such an amendment would have no material impact on the current legislative framework.

Magilligan: New Prison

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice how much public money has been spent on the preparation and development of the new Prison at Magilligan in the last four years.

(AQW 3462/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total costsspent to date on the preparation and development of the new Prison at Magilligan is £ 3,772,595.This represents a small adjustment to previous figures shown in AQW4546/11 following finalisation of accrued costs.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Review

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the conclusion in the interim report 'Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service' to 'focus on rehabilitation, safety and cost', whether the next stage of the Review will include examining the benefits of the Prison Service owned site at Magilligan and the work at Foyleview.

(AQW 3463/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have made clear my intentions to modernise the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Work on the development of a new estates strategy will assess the future role of the prison at Magilligan. In line with the Prison Review Teams findings this will include exploring a range of options for the future site including examining the existing benefits of the Magilligan site.

Disruptive Behaviour During Court Sittings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what measures he intends to introduce to address deliberate disruptive behaviour by member of the public during court sittings, including heckling and applauding.

(AQW 3623/11-15)

Mr Ford: The conduct and management of proceedings during a court hearing is entirely a matter for the judiciary.

There are a wide range of statutory powers available to the judiciary across the various court tiers which are deemed sufficient. I therefore have no plans to introduce additional measures.

Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many court cases are currently subject to the Justice and Security (NI) Act 2007 in each court division; and to detail the nature of the offences.

(AQW 3629/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of 21 October 2011, there were a total of 21 active cases against which a Certificate under Section 1 of the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 (the Act) has been issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Section 4 of the Act provides for these cases to be held only in Belfast unless the Lord Chief Justice otherwise directs.N.I.This section has no associated Explanatory Notes

A list of the offence types associated with these cases is set out below.

- Aiding and Abetting /Assisting Offenders
- Blackmail and Obtaining Money by Deception
- False Imprisonment/Kidnapping
- Firearm and Other Weapons Offences
- Hijacking
- Intimidation
- Murder / Attempted Murder
- Offences relating to Explosives
- Offences Relating to Proscribed Organisations
- Pervertingthe Course of Justice
- Possession Of Articles For Use In Terrorism
- Possession/Conversion of Criminal Property
- Provision of money/property for purposes of terrorism
- Rape and Other Sexual Offences
- Serious Assaults

District Policing Partnerships

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what steps he intends to take to assure members of District Policing Partnerships, and the public in attendance, that open business can be conducted without fear of intimidation or threats by those intent on disrupting the business of the Partnerships.

(AQW 3654/11-15)

Mr Ford: The safety of the community is a key priority for the Department of Justice, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and this has been reinforced in the 2011/14 Policing Plan. It is also true that people have a right to protest, although they do not have a right to disrupt a meeting.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board informs me that the conduct of DPP meetings is for the DPP itself. Where protests at DPP meetings have escalated to cause disruption, or where it is deemed that people are attending with the intent to disrupt, a judgment call is taken by the Chair and members on the day. They may additionally want to liaise with their local commander in advance.

In relation to the recent protest on 20 October, Derry DPP is extremely aware of their responsibilities in relation to the health and safety of those attending DPP meetings (staff, public, members and police officers) and a risk assessment for DPP members and staff has been carried out by Derry City Council. The Chair and Vice Chair meet with the Area Commander in advance of every meeting in public for an updated risk assessment.

I would note that despite the recent protests, DerryDPP has fulfilled its statutory requirements in relation to holding meetings in public and has successfully engaged with the public to help build safer, confident and shared communities.

Sentencing: Previous Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2832/11-15. whether the stated legislation also refers to suspended sentences which have been handed down in a separate jurisdiction and whether these sentences can be activated or taken into consideration upon conviction for an offence in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3667/11-15)

Mr Ford: The legislation that allows previous convictions in other jurisdictions to be taken into account when sentencing for crimes committed in Northern Ireland includes suspended sentences. A suspended sentence that has been imposed in another jurisdiction cannot be activated in Northern Ireland. Activation would, instead, remain a matter for the sentencing jurisdiction.

Separated Republican Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what actions the separated republican prisoners are refusing to carry out whilst on protest.

(AQW 3668/11-15)

Mr Ford: Separated republican prisoners are not complying with a number of requirements whilst on protest. These include:

- refusing to comply with the full body search procedure on committal and discharge to the prison; and
- not keeping themselves, their cells and other articles and property clean and tidy.

Some separated republican prisoners are also refusing to comply with head counts and body checks, by blocking their cell observation windows.

Secrecy in Civil Courts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the Government proposals to expand the use of secrecy in Civil Courts to protect national security.

(AQW 3669/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am currently considering the proposals contained in the UK Government's Green Paper on Justice and Security relating to how sensitive material should be dealt with in civil proceedings.

I have written to the Attorney General for Northern Irelandto seek his views.

Additionally, I have advised the Justice Committee and the Executive Committee of the publication of the Green Paper and will keep them advised of developments.

Cost of Keeping an Inmate in Prison

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the average annual cost of keeping an inmate in prison in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK; for an estimate of by how much this gap will reduce when the current prison reform process is complete.

(AQW 3676/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the cost per prisoner place in 2009-10 for Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. This is the most recent year for which comparable information is available.

Year	Northern Ireland	England&Wales	Scotland
2009-10	£77,831	£44,086	£36,661

While the cost stated has validity in assessing year on year improvements within the organisation, it has less validity when used to make comparisons between organisations as the calculation in Northern Ireland uses different elements to those in the other jurisdictions. For example, Northern Ireland Prison Service includes the cost of the headquarters function and education in its calculation.

At this stage the Northern Ireland Prison Service estimates that the cost per prisoner place will fall to approximately £60,000 when the current reform process is complete. This is subject to the successful delivery of the voluntary exit scheme and construction of new accommodation as part of the Estates Strategy.

Legal Aid

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how much his Department has spent on legal aid since May 2010.

(AQW 3702/11-15)

Mr Ford: From May 2010 to 30 September 2011 the total legal aid expenditure by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission was £129,233,232.46. The table below shows the breakdown between criminal legal aid and civil legal aid.

Legal Aid Scheme	Total
Civil Legal Aid	£61,300,950.82
Criminal Legal Aid	£67,932,281.64
Total Expenditure	**£129,233,232.46**

It should be noted that payments made during this period will include remuneration for work carried out prior to May 2010.

Current Court Numbers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of courts currently operating; and to outline any plans for them to be rationalized.

(AQW 3704/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 21 courthouses operating in Northern Ireland, five of which function as Hearing Centres and are open only on court sitting days. This number does not include Banbridge

courthouse which has not been used for court business for some time and is currently being leased out to accommodate the inquiry into Hyponatraemia related deaths.

My officials have prepared a draft consultation paper seeking views on proposals to close the fiveHearing Centres and to transfer that businessto an alternative court venue. These proposals will be subject to a full publicconsultation exercise which I plan to launch this month.

Separated Republican Prisoners' Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what (i) concessions; (ii) allowances; and (iii) alterations have made by the Prison Service as a result of negotiations following the commencement of the Republican separated prisoners protest and their refusal to comply with prison regulations.

(AQW 3708/11-15)

Mr Ford: The agreement of 12 August 2010 was the outcome of discussions with the facilitators appointed by me as Justice Minister and the means by which the protest action at that time was brought to an end. The current protest has not been the subject of negotiation and no concessions, allowances or alterations have been made by the Prison Service. Republican separated prisoners who are engaged in protest action are on a restricted regime designed to safely manage and contain the situation.

Courts Estate: Working of

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of whether the working of the Courts estate will change by the end of 2013.

(AQW 3709/11-15)

Mr Ford: The business of the courts will remain unchanged by the end of 2013. However the structure and number of courthouses may change by that date.

My officials have prepared a draft consultation paper seeking views on proposals to close five hearing centres and to transfer that business and staff to an alternative court venue. These proposals will be subject to a full public consultation exercise which I plan to launch in November. The proposals form part of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service estate strategy which in turn forms part of the overall Department of Justice Estate Strategy.

Visiting Privileges: Members of the Oireachtas

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice whether he will consider allowing Members of the Oireachtas special permission to visit prisoners in this jurisdiction without using family visits.

(AQW 3710/11-15)

Mr Ford: The current Northern Ireland Prison Service Standing Orders do not include Members of the Oireachtas within the category of "elected representative". In light of a recent request from a member of the Oireachtas I have asked my officials to review this arrangement. I will write to the member when this review is completed.

Access to Justice Review Team

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what liason the members of the Access to Justice Review team had with members of the general public who were litigants, prior to the completion of the Access to Justice Review Report.

(AQW 3736/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Access to Justice Review team met a wide range of organisations and individuals during the course of the review, including members of the general public who were litigants. The Access to Justice Report has been published for public consultation. When I published it, I encouraged elected

representatives and the wider public to read it and comment as part of the consultation. In addition, my department has written to more than 450 individuals and organisations seeking their views. I would welcome responses by 13 December.

Access to Justice Review Report

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that the views of civil litigants and the victims of crime are tested before any final decisions are made on the implementation of the recommendations in the Access to Justice Review Report.

(AQW 3737/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Access to Justice Report has been published for public consultation. When I published the report, I encouraged elected representatives and the wider public to read it and comment as part of the consultation. In addition, my department has written to over 450 individuals and organisations seeking their views on the report, including Victim Support Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I would welcome responses by 13December 2011.

Separated Republican Prisoners' Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, of the 28 separated Republican prisoners refusing to conform to prison regulations, how many have signed the required compact; and how many have signed the compact personally.

(AQW 3740/11-15)

Mr Ford: 22 of the 28 separated republican prisoners refusing to conform to prison rules have signed the required compact personally. As set out in the response to AQW 1015/11 all prisoners who apply for entry into separated accommodation are provided with a copy of the compact at the point of application and a prison governor explains to them that the terms of the compact, prison rules and the rule of law will apply. Every applicant must sign the application form and in the small minority of cases where the compact itself has not been signed, the Northern Ireland Prison Service is satisfied that the prisoner has been made fully aware of the terms of compact.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is satisfied that this process, which is always witnessed by an additional officer, demonstrates sufficient acceptance of the terms of the compact.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3745/11-15)

Mr Ford: Travel costs incurred in the last 12 months are as follows:

Minister	Departmental Officials
£850	£261,210

The travel costs quoted are for the last 12 months of audited expenditure (2010/2011) and are for the Department excluding agencies and executive NDPBs. Ministerial car costs are provided by PSNI and are not recharged.

Separated Republican Prisoners' Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to date of the protest by Republican separated prisoners including damage to equipment, subsequent clear-up, repair and replacment of the equipment, broken down by each individual incident in which damage occurred.

(AQW 3777/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost to date of the protest by republican separated prisoners is £500,320 broken down as follows:

	Cost
Cell damage of 6 May 2011	£8,800
Cell damage of 30 June 2011	£5,600
Cell damage of 1 July 2011	£6,400
Fire damage to recreation room of 1 July 2011	£199,100
Cleaning cost of ongoing protest in the financial year to date	£157,005
Responding to the protest has also resulted in Additional staffing costs of	£123,415

European Arrest Warrants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3013/11-15, to detail the number of European Arrest Warrants that are currently outstanding in each court division; and how many of these warrants were issued more than twelve months ago.

(AQW 3778/11-15)

Mr Ford: Four European Arrest Warrantsare currently outstanding, each of which is more than 12 months old. Three warrants were issued from the Division of Belfast and one from the Division of Fermanagh & Tyrone.

Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to outline the future plans for the Northern Ireland Prison Service museum.

(AQW 3782/11-15)

Mr Ford: The future plans for the Northern IrelandPrisonServiceMuseumhave not yet been formulated. There is a large collection of artefacts and documents currently held in the PrisonServiceCollege. Many of these items still need to be catalogued; some are currently on loan as part of the exhibition in Crumlin Road gaol and other items are, and will remain, on display in the College. In the meantime the Prison Service will consider and set out plans for the museum following consultation with key stakeholders.

Judicial System: Balance of Human Rights

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of whether the judicial system balances the human rights of an offender with those of the victim.

(AQW 3818/11-15)

Mr Ford: The right of a defendant to a fair trial is enshrined in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and must be respected by the justice system. It is based on the premise that an individual is innocent until proven guilty. That is not to say that the needs of victims should be overlooked, and all victims have a right to expect that they should be treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity.

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, which was published in March 2011, gives a commitment that the criminal justice agencies will treat victims with dignity, respect and sensitivity. I remain committed to improving the victim's experience of the criminal justice process.

Delivery of Non-molestation Orders

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to privatise the delivery of non-molestation orders.

(AQW 3823/11-15)

Mr Ford: More than 6,500 non-molestation or occupation orders are granted by the courts in Northern Ireland annually. These orders may be served in a number of different ways, but in the majority of cases service is affected by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is the only jurisdiction in Britain and Ireland where police routinely serve such orders. Elsewhere, responsibility for service rests with the applicant and in most cases will involve the use of civilian process servers.

The PSNI have indicated that they would wish to reduce their involvement in the service of these orders so as to allow them to target their resources on core policing functions. My officials will work with PSNI to consider alternative methods of service.

It will be important that any alternative arrangements command public confidence and are no less effective. They will, therefore, be developed in conjunction with key stakeholders and will be subject to consultation.

Domestic Violence Offences: Increased Sentences

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has to increase sentencing for people convicted of domestic violence offences.

(AQW 3830/11-15)

Mr Ford: The maximum penalty for common assault, an offence which often arises in domestic violence cases, was increased this year to six months imprisonment by provisions in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Changes have also recently been introduced which would help in the defence of those who have killed a violent and abusive partner after suffering prolonged abuse.

There are no further plans, currently, to increase the sentences for offences where domestic violence is the motivation. However, the Lord Chief Justice recently announced a priority list of areas where fresh sentencing guidance for the judiciary would be developed. Offences involving domestic violence are included in this list.

Alongside this work I have been considering a range of potential mechanisms by which greater transparency, consistency and understanding of sentencing practice might be achieved. I hope to announce proposals in the near future on how best these might be delivered in a way that will promote public confidence.

Department for Regional Development

Departmental Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.

(AQW 3366/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Department's spending in the Belfast City Council area is provided in the table overleaf.

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Translink[1] (Department's funding)	3	6	8	17	12	6	9	2	2	6
Roads Service[2]	26	24	23	35	23	40	23	25	22	19
Northern Ireland Water[3]	Note 4						61	54	24	8

Notes:

1. There are other bus/rail projects funded by the Department which would impact on a number of council areas including the Belfast City Council area. However, their costs cannot be identified separately, for example, purchase of new trains, platform extension programme and New Rail Vision/Disability Discrimination Act works. Similarly spending on services provided by NI Railways, Ulsterbus and specifically Metro may be relevant. Published accounts are available for all these companies.

2. Roads Service allocates its total budget for expenditure on roads across all the district council areas on the basis of priorities. While the actual spend may be within one district council area, the benefits of such schemes are not confined to that district council, constituency or county in which they are located.

3. This reflects expenditure within NI Water's Capital Works Programme which includes approximately £130 million Belfast Sewers Project, £4.1 million Belfast City Centre Zone Watermain Improvements and £2.4 million Belvoir Park Sewers.

4. Expenditure prior to April 2007 is not readily available by council area and could only be retrieved at disproportionate cost.

Spending on operating costs and minor capital projects has not been provided as this would require significant work to analyse by council area and could only be provided at disproportionate expense.

Staff: Third Level Education Courses

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of staff in his Department who have undertaken a third level education course paid for (a) in whole; or (b) in part by his Department in each of the last three years; (ii) the (a) titles; (b) fees or costs of the courses of study undertaken; (iii) if the course was full-time or part-time; and (iv) the educational institute which provided the course.

(AQW 3384/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The numbers of staff within my Department who have undertaken third level education courses paid for wholly or in part by the Department in each of the last three years are set out below.

Category	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Number of staff undertaking third level education courses paid for in whole by the Department	31	21	5
Number of staff undertaking third level education courses paid for in part by the Department	76	85	53

Details of the course titles, fees, methods of study and educational institutes involved are shown in the attached table.

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2008/09	HNC in Civil Engineering	8	Part time (D/R)	Belfast MetropolitanCollege	631.00	Whole
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	6	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	598.00	Whole
2008/09	CIPD Certificate in Training Practice	3	Part time (D/R)	DMS Personnel Consultants (Ireland) Ltd	2,643.75	Whole
2008/09	NEBOSH General Certificate	1	Part time (D/R)	Training Solutions NI	954.50	Whole
2008/09	BSc In Business Studies	1	Evening Class	Belfast Metropolitan College	832.00	Part
2008/09	HNC in Civil Engineering	2	Own Time	Belfast Metropolitan College	380.00	Part
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	1	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	364.00	Part
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	1	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	474.00	Part

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2008/09	CIPFA Professional Accountancy	1	Evening Class	CIPFA	767.00	Part
2008/09	MSc in Transport Planning & Engineering	1	Distance Learning	Napier University	1,000.00	Part
2008/09	BTEC Cert in Intro to Life Coaching Skills & Practise	1	Distance Learning	Newcastle College	955.20	Part
2008/09	HNC in Civil Engineering	2	Own Time	North West Regional College	571.12	Part
2008/09	Degree in Business & Management Studies	1	Evening Class	Queens University	672.00	Part
2008/09	BA Business Admin and Management	1	Evening Class	South West College	672.00	Part
2008/09	BSc In Business Studies	1	Evening Class	South West College	348.00	Part
2008/09	NC Vehicle Repair and Technology	1	Evening Class	South West Regional College	240.00	Part
2008/09	HNC in Civil Engineering	1	Evening Class	Southern Regional College	192.00	part
2008/09	Certificate in Legal Studies	1	Distance Learning	The Open University	628.00	Part
2008/09	Diploma in Asphalt Technology	1	Distance Learning	University of Derby	1,000.00	Part
2008/09	BSc Computing & Information Systems	1	Evening Class	University of Ulster	520.80	Part
2008/09	BSc in Accountancy	1	Evening Class	University of Ulster	694.40	Part

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2008/09	MSc Construction & Engineering	1	Own Time	University of Ulster	912.00	Part
2008/09	PHD in Engineering	1	Own Time	University of Ulster	932.00	Part
2008/09	HNC in Vehicle Operations Management	1	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	462.75	Part
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	7	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	474.00	Part
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	10	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	364.00	Part
2008/09	Diploma in International Financial Reporting Standards	1	Distance Learning	Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland	1,000.00	Part
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	8	Part time (D/R)	North West Regional College	396.48	Part
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	2	Part time (D/R)	North West Regional College	280.00	Part
2008/09	NC in Vehicle Technology	2	Part time (D/R)	South Eastern Regional College	270.00	Part
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	4	Part time (D/R)	Southern Regional College	276.00	Part
2008/09	NC in Civil Engineering	3	Part time (D/R)	Southern Regional College	160.00	Part
2008/09	BEng Hons in Civil Engineering	9	Part time (D/R)	University of Ulster	520.80	Part
2008/09	MSc Infrastructure Engineering	1	Part time (D/R)	University of Ulster	912.00	Part
2008/09	CIMA Accountancy	1	Part time	University of Ulster	1,200.00	Whole
2008/09	CIPFA Accountancy	1	Part time	CIPFA	1,200.00	Whole

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2008/09	CIPFA Accountancy	1	Part time	CIPFA	1,200.00	Whole
2008/09	Accounting Technician	1	Part time	CIPFA	1,200.00	Whole
2008/09	BA Business Management	1	Part time	South Eastern Regional College	574.00	Part
2008/09	ACCA	1	Part time	University of Ulster	1,200.00	Whole
2008/09	MSc Applied Economics	1	Part time	University of Ulster	1,100.00	Whole
2008/09	Post Grad Diploma (Masters Degree) in HRM	1	Part time	University of Ulster	50.00	Part
2008/09	BA Hons Business Studies & Management	1	Part time	Queens University	597.33	Part
2008/09	Advanced Diploma in Management Practice	1	Part time	University of Ulster	480.00	Part
2008/09	BSc (Hons) Business Studies	1	Part time	University of Ulster	347.20	Part
2008/09	BA Hons Business Studies	1	Part time	North Down & Ards Institute	633.00	Part
2008/09	Masters in Legal Science	1	Part time	Queens University	608.00	Part
2008/09	Diploma in Public Audit (DPA)	2	Part time	CIPFA	1,835.00	Whole
2008/09	Diploma in Public Audit (DPA)	2	Part time	CIPFA	4,165.00	Whole

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2008/09	Advanced Diploma in Public Audit (ADPA)	2	Part time	CIPFA	3,266.50	Whole
2008/09	Member Institute of Internal Audit (MIIA)	1	Part time	IIA	3,413.00	Whole
2009/10	BSc In Business Studies	1	Evening Class	Belfast Metropolitan College	710.40	Part
2009/10	HNC in Civil Engineering	7	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	540.00	Whole
2009/10	HNC in Civil Engineering	8	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	432.00	Part
2009/10	HNC in Vehicle Operations Management	1	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	369.60	Part
2009/10	NC in Civil Engineering	14	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	328.00	Part
2009/10	NC in Civil Engineering	6	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	410.00	Whole
2009/10	CIPD Certificate in Training Practice	1	Part time (D/R)	DMS Personnel Consultants (Ireland) LTD	2,161.00	Whole
2009/10	MSc Transport Planning & Engineering	2	Distance Learning	NapierUniversity	1,000.00	Part
2009/10	HNC in Civil Engineering	1	Own Time	North West Regional College	501.12	Part
2009/10	HNC in Civil Engineering	2	Own Time	North West Regional College	320.00	Part
2009/10	NC in Civil Engineering	8	Part time (D/R)	North West Regional College	308.00	Part
2009/10	NC in Civil Engineering	2	Own Time	North North West Regional College	424.48	Part

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2009/10	Degree in Business & Management Studies	1	Evening Class	QueensUniversity	344.00	Part
2009/10	HNC in Vehicle Operations Management	1	Evening Class	South Eastern Regional College	200.00	Part
2009/10	NC in Vehicle Technology	1	Part time (D/R)	South Eastern Regional College	299.20	Part
2009/10	BSc In Business Studies	1	Evening Class	South West College	355.20	Part
2009/10	NC in Civil Engineering	3	Part time (D/R)	South West College	376.40	Part
2009/10	City & Guilds Two Dimensional CAD Level 3	1	Evening Class	Southern Regional College	136.80	Part
2009/10	HNC in Civil Engineering	3	Part time (D/R)	Southern Regional College	326.40	Part
2009/10	NC in Civil Engineering	5	Part time (D/R)	Southern Regional College	160.00	Part
2009/10	NC in Civil Engineering	7	Part time (D/R)	Southern Regional College	279.20	Part
2009/10	NEBOSH General Certificate	3	Part time (D/R)	Training Solutions NI	790.00	Whole
2009/10	MSc in Construction Management	1	E-Learning	University of Salford	1,000.00	Part
2009/10	MScBridge Engineering	1	Distance Learning	University of Surrey	768.00	Part
2009/10	Beng Hons in Civil Engineering	11	Part time (D/R)	University of Ulster	532.80	Part
2009/10	BSc in Accountancy	1	Evening Class	University of Ulster	737.62	Part

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2009/10	MSc Construction & Engineering	1	Own Time	University of Ulster	936.00	Part
2009/10	MSc in Infrastructure Engineering	1	Own Time	University of Ulster	936.00	Part
2009/10	PHD in Engineering	1	Own Time	University of Ulster	956.00	Part
2009/10	ACCA	1	Part time	Richard Clarke Academy	600.00	Whole
2009/10	BA Business Management	1	Part time	South Eastern Regional College	573.00	Part
2009/10	ACCA	1	Part time	University of Ulster	132.00	Whole
2009/10	HNC Business & Finance	1	Part time	Northern Regional College	88.00	Part
2009/10	BSc Hons Business Studies	1	Part time	Northern Regional College	464.00	Part
2009/10	BA Hons Business Studies & Management	1	Part time	QueensUniversity	597.33	Part
2009/10	Associated & Certified Chartered Accountants Professional Qualification	1	Part time	Belfast Metropolitan College	485.34	Part
2009/10	BSc (Hons) Business Studies	1	Part time	University of Ulster	710.40	Part
2009/10	Advanced Certificate in Investigative Practice (ACIP)	2	Part time	CIPFA/Bond Solon	3,500.00	Whole

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2010/11	HNC in Civil Engineering	7	Own Time	Belfast Metropolitan College	432.00	Part
2010/11	NC in Civil Engineering	6	Part time (D/R)	Belfast Metropolitan College	336.00	Part
2010/11	MSc Transport Planning & Engineering	2	Distance Learning	NapierUniversity	1,000.00	Part
2010/11	HNC in Civil Engineering	1	Own Time	North West Regional College	344.28	Part
2010/11	HNC in Civil Engineering	1	Part time (D/R)	North West Regional College	444.96	Part
2010/11	NC in Civil Engineering	2	Own Time	North West Regional College	308.00	Part
2010/11	NC in Civil Engineering	1	Part time (D/R)	North West Regional College	424.64	Part
2010/11	NC in Vehicle Technology	1	Part time (D/R)	South Eastern Regional College	299.20	Part
2010/11	NC in Civil Engineering	3	Evening Class	South West College	230.40	Part
2010/11	HNC in Civil Engineering	2	Part time (D/R)	Southern Regional College	394.40	Part
2010/11	HNC in Civil Engineering	2	Own Time	Southern Regional College	208.00	Part
2010/11	NC in Civil Engineering	6	Part time (D/R)	Southern Regional College	176.00	Part
2010/11	NC in Electrical & Electronic Engineering	1	Part time (D/R)	Southern Regional College	367.20	Part
2010/11	MSc in Construction Management	1	E-Learning	University of Salford	1,000.00	Part
2010/11	MScBridge Engineering	1	Distance Learning	University of Surrey	840.00	Part

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2010/11	BSc Computing & Information Systems	1	Evening Class	University of Ulster	544.80	Part
2010/11	Beng Hons in Civil Engineering	8	Part time (D/R)	University of Ulster	544.80	Part
2010/11	BSc in Accountancy	1	Evening Class	University of Ulster	762.40	Part
2010/11	MSc in Infrastructure Engineering	1	Own Time	University of Ulster	955.20	Part
2010/11	ACCA	1	Part time	Richard Clarke Academy	600.00	Whole
2010/11	BA Business Management	1	Part time	South Eastern Regional College	584.00	Part
2010/11	ACCA	1	Part time	Richard Clarke Academy	431.00	Whole
2010/11	BSc Hons Business Studies	1	Part time	Northern Regional College	464.00	Part
2010/11	BA Hons Business Studies & Management	1	Part time	QueensUniversity	597.33	Part
2010/11	Associated & Certified Chartered Accountants Professional Qualification	1	Part time	Belfast Metropolitan College	634.35	Part
2010/11	BSc (Hons) Business Studies	1	Part time	University of Ulster	544.80	Part
2010/11	Professional Certificate in Regulatory Affairs	1	Part time	Centre for Parliamentary Studies	2,950.00	Whole

Year	Course Title	Number of Staff undertaking third level education course	Method of Study	Educational Institute	Course Fees (Per Person, Course & Year) £	Paid in whole or part
2010/11	Advanced Certificate in Investigative Practice (ACIP)	2	Part time	CIPFA/Bond Solon	3,550.00	Whole
	Total	**271**				

Blue Badges

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of people who are currently (i) eligible for; and (ii) in receipt of a blue badge, compared to the numbers in each of the previous two years.

(AQW 3415/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not have any details of the number of persons eligible for a Blue Badge. Details of the number of applicants, who met the eligibility criteria and received Blue Badges since 1 April 2008 to 20 October 2011, are provided in the table below:

Year	Blue Badges Issued
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009	33,097
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010	30,720
1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011	35,205
1 April 2011 – 20 October 2011	21,441

Salt and Grit Resources

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what extra salt and grit resources will be available for the coming winter.

(AQW 3441/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Prior to the start of each winter service season, my Department's Roads carries out a significant amount of pre-planning, including the early purchase of an adequate stock of salt with the aim of meeting the needs of the full winter service programme without the need to re-stock.

Hitherto this stock amounted to some 65,000 tonnes however, following last year's severe weather, Roads Service has reviewed its assessment and has increased salt stocks significantly, to approximately 110,000 tonnes. In addition, Roads Service has arrangements in place to supplement stocks of salt during the winter period, if necessary.

Grit supplies, as opposed to salt supplies, are more readily available from local quarries and are therefore purchased as required by local section offices.

NI Water Sewers and Pumping Stations

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development, where there is an outstanding agreement with NI Water or its predecessor, what enforcement measures can be taken against an administrator or receiver to ensure that sewers and pumping stations are brought up to a sufficient standard for adoption.

(AQW 3475/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are currently some 322 existing agreements in place with persons constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system, to adopt the system at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met. This includes agreements formerly with its predecessor Water Service which transferred to NIW on 1 April 2007. The other party to the agreement is required to provide security for the discharge by them of any obligations imposed by the agreement. This normally takes the form of a bond surety currently set at 40% of the total cost to construct the sewerage system, estimated using a schedule of rates prepared by the company. NIW can call upon the bond security should the person fail to meet the terms of the agreement. In such cases NIW would complete the work on the sewer or pumping station using the bond surety and adopt the sewerage system.

Where an administrator or receiver has been appointed, and work to bring the sewers or pumping station up to an adoptable standard is not completed within a specified time, NIW will call upon the bond security to bring the sewerage system up to adoptable standard and advise the administrator or receiver of the procedure and its intention to adopt the sewerage system.

NI Water Unadopted Sewers and Pumping Stations

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development, where outstanding agreements with NI Water or its predecessor are in place, what enforcement measures can be taken to ensure that unadopted sewers and pumping stations are brought up to a requisite standard for adoption.

(AQW 3476/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are currently some 322 existing agreements in place with persons constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system, to adopt the system at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met. This includes agreements formerly with its predecessor Water Service which transferred to NIW on 1 April 2007. The other party to the agreement is required to provide security for the discharge by them of any obligations imposed by the agreement. This normally takes the form of a bond surety currently set at 40% of the total cost to construct the sewerage system, estimated using a schedule of rates prepared by the company. NIW can call upon the bond security should the person fail to meet the terms of the agreement. In such cases NIW would complete the work on the sewer or pumping station using the bond surety and adopt the sewerage system.

Translink: Co-ordinated Timetables

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to ensure that the relevant Translink bus timetables are co-ordinated with the train timetables for Bangor to ensure the maximum availability for, and use by, passengers.

(AQW 3533/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me that during the past 12 months timetable alterations have been made to improve connections at Bangor between bus and rail. An example of this is where the Groomsport and Donaghadee services have been re-timed to arrive/depart 5 minutes earlier.

Bus Routes in North Down: Reduction in Services

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to list any bus routes in the North Down area that are facing a reduction in services.

(AQW 3534/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There were some alterations to services in the North Down area implemented on 1 July and 1 September 2011. The most significant change involved the removal of the Holywood Town Service, which also served Helen's Bay en route to and from Bangor, and this was due to lack of patronage on the service.

No further reductions are planned at this time.

NSL Services Group

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 1969/11-15, to detail (i) the total cost to date to his Department of contracts with NSL Services Group; and (ii) the total money received by his Department as payment for penalties imposed.

(AQW 3538/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that payments of £43m have been made to NSL (formerly NCP), in respect of the parking enforcement and car-park management contract which commenced in October 2006.

Officials have also advised that income received from Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs), to the end of September 2011, is £24.9m.

I should advise that revenue generated by the payment of PCNs is used, along with income from car-parking and other charges, to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service by Central Government.

Appointment of Special Advisers: Review

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the status within his Department of the Department of Finance and Personnel's review of the appointment of Special Advisers.

(AQW 3558/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Minister of Finance and Personnel has written to Executive colleagues to advise that the new arrangements recommended in the review will take effect from 6 September 2011 for future appointments. A revised Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers is being prepared by DFP and will be issued to Permanent Secretaries shortly.

Airport Shuttle Buses

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the seat occupancy on the shuttle buses operating between Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Centre; and (ii) the profit or loss made by this service in each of the last two available years.

(AQW 3562/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me that in regard to (i) the information cannot be provided in the format requested as they do not record seat occupancy but rather passenger journeys. The number of passenger journeys for the period is as follows:-

2009/10	2010/11
335,120	326,072

Translink have further advised that in regard to (ii) they are unable to provide details of financial performance over the period requested as such information is considered commercially sensitive.

Parking Tickets: Departmental Controlled Carpark, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of parking tickets issued because of insufficient payment for each day between 29 August 2011 and 5 September 2011 for each departmental controlled carpark in Ballymena.

(AQW 3586/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the parking contravention which is most closely associated with insufficient payment is when vehicles are 'parked after the expiry of time paid for' in a Pay and Display car-park. Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) issued for that contravention in Roads Service's Pay and Display car-parks in Ballymena from 29 August 2011 to 5 September 2011 are contained in the following table:

	PCNs Issued for 'parked after expiry of time paid for'							
Car-Park	**29/8**	**30/8**	**31/8**	**1/9**	**2/9**	**3/9**	**4/9**	**5/9**
Ballymoney Road	0	21	10	2	11	3	0	8
Church Street 3	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0
Broughshane Street	4	2	3	4	0	0	0	0

Strangford Constituency: Unadopted Roads

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the unadopted roads in the Strangford constituency with an outstanding road bond.

(AQW 3651/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to her Assembly Question AQW 3650/11-15.

Burning of Effigies in Roads Service Owned Car Parks

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's position on the burning of effigies in Roads Service owned car parks.

(AQW 3832/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service does not approve or support the unauthorised use of the Department's property for any purpose.

Under the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, my Department has the power to remove any bonfire material near or on a public road, which may constitute a danger to road users. However, bonfire management is an inter-agency issue and it is often difficult to find solutions acceptable to the interested parties, when problems arise.

The support, co-operation and involvement of local communities is an important factor, as was recognised in the report of the inter-agency group, which produced guidelines on bonfire management. In these circumstances, my Department's Roads Service will continue to take a joint approach with the other agencies in the management of bonfire sites.

Roads Service experience has been that many of the complaints received from the public are related to the stockpiling of materials on sites adjacent to public roads, which are not owned by Roads Service. On occasions where the overspill from bonfire stockpiles obstructs a public road or footway, Roads Service will remove it or arrange for it to be pushed back off the road onto the bonfire site, in consultation with the police and local communities as necessary.

However, Roads Service has a duty of care to its staff and the immediate and ongoing safety of personnel tasked with removal work must be taken into consideration, in consultation with the police and other parties.

In the relatively few instances where bonfires are actually brought onto public roads for lighting, Roads Service will arrange for burnt out debris to be removed and will carry out any repairs to carriageways, footways and street lights that may be needed.

Bus Service for Students from Queen's University to Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will reinstate the bus service for students from Queen's University to Derry, in light of the challenges that were faced by students trying to get from Queen's to the Europa bus station during last year's severe winter weather.

(AQW 4009/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have operational responsibility in regard to service provision. They have advised me that they have no plans to reinstate the bus service at Queen's University (QUB) to Londonderry. They did say that they did previously provide buses to Londonderry from the Student Union facing Queens University on a Friday, however, the buses were only used by a very small number of students and the service became unsustainable. This appears to have been because lecture times on Fridays varied for individual students and many were unwilling to wait until late afternoon. Currently Translink transports students to Queens University on Sunday nights on services departing from Foyle Street at 19:00.

Translink has completed a review of winter preparedness and resilience across the organisation as a result of the lengthy period of disruption last winter due to extreme weather. This review looked at communications plans, fleet availability, staff resources, emergency cover and associated issues, i.e. resource plans. An action plan was drawn up following last year's review and is being progressed. It is not clear that there was any major problems for students at QUB getting to the Europa Bus Centre last year, especially as a train runs from Botanic station to the site of the Europa Bus Centre and Metro bus services ran reasonably well during the period.

Department for Social Development

Boiler Scrappage Scheme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many households qualify for the Boiler Scrappage Scheme; and (ii) how many applications have been successful.

(AQW 3321/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Any private sector householder, aged 60 years or over, in receipt of Rate Relief or over 70 and in receipt of Lone Pensioner Allowance but not Housing Benefit and with an existing boiler that is 15 years old or more can apply for the scheme. The number of householders who meet all the eligible criteria is unknown.

At 30 September, 504 application forms from eligible applicants have been received and 114 formal approvals to proceed with replacement works have been issued.

Co-ownership Housing Applications

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what is the current level of uptake of co-ownership housing applications.

(AQW 3390/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011 181 homes have been purchased through the Co-Ownership Scheme. With the recent funding I have announced for the remainder of this financial year it is anticipated that Co-Ownership will help around 600 homes to be purchased. In addition, the £3.25 million FirstBuy NI pilot scheme I launched last week will enable another 100 people to enter homeownership this year.

Staff: Third Level Education Courses

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of staff in his Department who have undertaken a third level education course paid for (a) in whole; or (b) in part by his Department in each of the last three years; (ii) the (a) titles; (b) fees or costs of the courses of study undertaken; (iii) if the course was full-time or part-time; and (iv) the educational institute which provided the course.

(AQW 3395/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is contained in the tables below for the last three academic years.

(a) and (b)

Year	Number of Staff Paid for in Whole	Number of Staff Paid for in Part
2008/2009	1	47
2009/2010	1	61
2010/2011	1	52

Includes staff receiving fees paid for each year of study

(II) – (IV) 2008/09

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
ACCA – Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	1,009.20	Part Time	University of Ulster
ACCA – Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	732.60	Part Time	University of Ulster
BA (Hons) Arts Culture & Society	364.59	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Arts, Culture & Society	504.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Arts, Culture & Society	706.37	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Business Management	606.96	Part Time	South Eastern Regional College
BA (Hons) Business Management	627.20	Part Time	South Eastern Regional College
BA (Hons) Business Studies	680.54	Part Time	South Eastern Regional College
BA (Hons) Business Studies & Management	336.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Business Studies & Management	168.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
BA (Hons) Humanities	488.00	Part Time	Open University
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	692.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	504.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	672.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Social Sciences	336.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Social Sciences with Social Policy	501.65	Part Time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Accounting	347.20	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	694.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	173.60	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	434.00	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	694.00	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies with Accountancy	388.47	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	694.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	694.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	347.20	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	710.94	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	694.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	694.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Counter Fraud & Criminal Justice	280.00	Part Time	University of Portsmouth

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
BSc (Hons) Counter Fraud & Criminal Justice	640.00	Part Time	University of Portsmouth
BSc (Hons) Information & Communication Technology	608.00	Part Time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Information & Technology	224.00	Part Time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Mathmatics	888.00	Part Time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Public Relations	447.60	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Social Sciences with Social Policy	488.00	Part Time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Social Sciences with Social Policy	506.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	628.59	Part Time	Belfast Metropolitan College
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	796.40	Part Time	Belfast Metropolitan College
LLB (Hons) Law	333.85	Part Time	University of Ulster
LLB (Hons) Law with Politics	520.80	Part Time	University of Ulster
MA Literature	1,000.00	Part Time	Open University
MA Social Policy	1,000.00	Part Time	Open University
MA Translation	912.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
Mres Social Research Methods	912.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
MSc Organisation & Learning	912.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
MSc Sustainable Rural Development	182.40	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
Post Grad Diploma – International Business	1,000.00	Part Time	University of Ulster
Post Grad Diploma – Social Research Skills	495.46	Part Time	University of Ulster
Total 2008/09	**28,272.02**		

(II) - (IV) 2009/10

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
ACCA - Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	812.60	Part Time	University of Ulster
BA (Hons) Arts Culture & Society	344.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Arts Culture & Society	516.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Arts, Culture & Society	688.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Business & Finance	211.82	Part Time	University of Ulster
BA (Hons) Business & Management Studies	516.00	Part Time	Open University
BA (Hons) Business Management	92.80	Part Time	South Eastern Regional College
BA (Hons) Business Management	206.02	Part Time	University of Ulster
BA (Hons) Business Studies	320.00	Part Time	South Eastern Regional College
BA (Hons) History & Social Sciences	344.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Humanities	215.95	Part Time	Open University
BA (Hons) Literature	527.65	Part Time	Open University
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	172.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	688.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	415.20	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	688.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	149.64	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
BA Professional Development	1,000.00	Part Time	Belfast Metropolitan College
BSc (Hons) Accounting	140.36	Part Time	South Eastern Regional College

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
BSc (Hons) Accounting	257.52	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Accounting	217.54	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	832.00	Part Time	Belfast Metropolitan College
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	710.40	Part Time	Southern Regional College
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	532.80	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	532.80	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	177.60	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	355.20	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Communication, Advertising and Marketing	1,000.00	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	710.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	355.20	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	710.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	710.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	710.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	710.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	704.00	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Counter Fraud & Criminal Justice	640.00	Part Time	University of Portsmouth
BSc (Hons) Counter Fraud & Criminal Justice Studies	568.00	Part Time	University of Portsmouth
BSc (Hons) Information & Communication Technology	643.68	Part Time	Open University

Course Title	**Fee/Cost £**	**Part-time/ Full-time**	**Educational Institute**
BSc (Hons) Physical Science	229.68	Part Time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Public Relations	532.80	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Social Policy	288.00	Part Time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Social Sciences with Social Policy Degree	504.00	Part Time	Open University
BSc Communications	173.60	Part Time	University of Ulster
BSc Psychology	504.00	Part Time	Open University
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	146.97	Part Time	Belfast Metropolitan College
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	161.01	Part Time	Belfast Metropolitan College
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	95.27	Part Time	University of Ulster
CIPD Graduate Programme	464.75	Part Time	DMS Consultants
LLB (Hons) Law	206.02	Part Time	University of Ulster
Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
LLB (Hons) Law	532.80	Part Time	University of Ulster
LLB (Hons) Law with Criminology	139.20	Part Time	University of Ulster
LLB Law with Politics	818.40	Part Time	University of Ulster
LLM Human Rights	936.00	Part Time	University of Ulster
MA Social Policy	540.00	Part Time	Open University
MA Translation	936.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
MSc Communication, Advertising and PR	1,000.00	Part Time	University of Ulster
MSc Innovation Management in the Public Service	1,230.77	Part Time	University of Ulster
MSc Organisation & Management	936.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
MSc Rural Development & Project Management	177.60	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
Post Graduate Diploma In Personal Management	1,000.00	Part Time	Queens University Belfast
Professional Accountancy	290.00	Part Time	CIPFA
Professional Accountancy	1,564.00	Part Time	CIPFA
Total 2009/10	**32,533.65**		

(II) - (IV) 2010/11

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
ACCA - Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	759.85	Part time	University of Ulster
BA (Hons) Arts Culture & Society	704.00	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Arts Culture & Society	704.00	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Business & Finance	113.66	Part time	University of Ulster
BA (Hons) Business Studies	161.36	Part time	Northern Regional College
BA (Hons) Business Studies	438.24	Part time	South Eastern Regional College
BA (Hons) Business Studies	235.32	Part time	University of Ulster
BA (Hons) Literature	542.89	Part time	Open University
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	512.00	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	168.96	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	704.00	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	317.85	Part time	Queens University Belfast

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	245.35	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	704.00	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	688.00	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA (Hons) Management & Business Studies	781.60	Part time	South Eastern Regional College
BA (Hons) Politics, Philosophy & Economics	320.00	Part time	Queens University Belfast
BA Business Management	704.00	Part time	South West College
BSc (Hons) Accounting	231.09	Part time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Accounting	116.22	Part time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	235.52	Part time	South Eastern Regional College
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	363.00	Part time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	181.60	Part time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Business Studies	726.40	Part time	University of Ulster
Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
BSc (Hons) Communication Advertising & Marketing	320.00	Part time	University of Ulster
BSC (Hons) Community Development	726.40	Part time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Community Development	710.40	Part time	University of Ulster
BSC (Hons) Community Development	694.40	Part time	University of Ulster
BSC (Hons) Community Development	704.00	Part time	University of Ulster
BSc (Hons) Counter Fraud & Criminal Justice	640.00	Part time	University of Portsmouth

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
BSc (Hons) Counter Fraud & Criminal Justice	692.88	Part time	University of Portsmouth
BSc (Hons) Counter Fraud & Criminal Justice	642.88	Part time	University of Portsmouth
BSc (Hons) Crime & Criminology	656.00	Part time	University of Portsmouth
BSc (Hons) Information & Communication Technology	628.00	Part time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Physical Science	285.44	Part time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Psychology	864.00	Part time	Open University
BSc (Hons) Sociology & Social Policy	363.20	Part time	University of Ulster
BSc Business Studies	177.60	Part time	University of Ulster
BSc Communications	120.80	Part time	University of Ulster
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	292.59	Part time	Belfast Metropolitan College
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	324.99	Part time	University of Ulster
LLB (Hons) Law	726.40	Part time	University of Ulster
LLB (Hons) Law	726.40	Part time	University of Ulster
LLB (Hons) Law with Criminology	168.96	Part time	University of Ulster
LLB (Hons) Law with Politics	710.40	Part time	University of Ulster
LLM Human Rights Law	955.20	Part time	University of Ulster
MA Social Research	307.20	Part time	Queens University Belfast
MPA - Master of Public Administration	1,000.00	Part time	University of Ulster
MPA - Master of Public Administration	1,000.00	Part time	University of Ulster
MSc Innovation Management in the Public Service	5,538.42	Part time	University of Ulster

Course Title	Fee/Cost £	Part-time/ Full-time	Educational Institute
MSc Organisation & Management	422.44	Part time	Queens University Belfast
PgDip/MSc Communication Advertising & Public Relations	299.52	Part time	University of Ulster
Professional Accountancy	463.00	Part time	CIPFA
Total 2010/11	**31,820.43**		

Welfare Reform: Implications on Future Poverty and Deprivation

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what research has been carried out to assess the implications of welfare reform on future poverty and deprivation.

(AQW 3409/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No specific research has been carried out to date by my department on the implications of welfare reform on future poverty and deprivation.

However, work is ongoing at present to develop a Policy Simulation Model (PSM) which will be used for poverty and scenario analysis. The PSM will produce outputs including the financial impacts on different demographic groups from policy changes to the tax and benefits system.

We are also planning to participate in a Department of Work and Pensions research project on the impact of housing benefit reform in the private rented sector, subject to us securing appropriate funds within October Monitoring.

The Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) was commissioned by the Minister for Welfare Reform in Great Britain to undertake an independent review of passported[1] benefits (for example free school meals, free eye tests etc) and provide advice on possible approaches to the provision of such benefits under Universal Credit. Following representations from me, SSAC has agreed to include Northern Ireland within the scope of this review. SSAC will develop guiding principles for the design of passported benefits under Universal Credit and it is intended that these will be presented to the Minister for Welfare Reform in Great Britain in January 2012.

Finally, on 5th September, an Equality Impact Assessment was issued for public consultation; the responses to this consultation will help us to assess the impact of the Welfare Reforms across the equality groups.

Welfare Reform

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any meetings he has had with the UK Government in relation to welfare reform.

(AQW 3410/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have discussed the issue of Welfare Reform on 3 separate occasions with Lord Freud the Minister of State responsible for Welfare Reform and on one occasion with the Secretary of State, the Rt.Hon. Owen Patterson MP.

Further, my officials are in regular weekly contact with Westminster officials about this and other relevant issues.

1 By Passported Benefits we mean those benefits to which working-age claimants of certain means-tested benefits are automatically entitled. For example, free school meals, free eye tests, free dental treatment, etc.

As a result of the various discussions that I have had with Westminster Ministers, I can assure Members that they are only too aware of the difficulties and challenges which we face, and which are unique to Northern Ireland.

I will continue to ensure that full account is taken of the particular circumstances that exist in Northern Ireland and that operational flexibilities and safeguards within the social security regime will be applied where necessary in the implementation of all of the welfare reform proposals, although I have to stress that this can only be done in line with the principle of parity.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an estimate in the number of families affected by fuel poverty in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3421/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Fuel poverty is measured through the House Condition Survey which is compiled every 3 years by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The latest survey was published using data from 2009.

The survey does not contain specific information about families, however, the results are broken down by household type and found that 14% of large family households (up 1% since 2006) and 63% of lone parent households (up from 46% in 2006) were in fuel poverty.

The provisional results of the next House Condition Survey including fuel poverty figures will be available by July/August 2011.

Strategic Review of Gambling Policy, Practice and Law

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the Department's consultation on the Strategic Review of Gambling Policy, Practice and Law, whether she is planning to relax the law to permit registered clubs and licensed premises to allow poker competitions.

(AQW 3424/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A major consultation on proposals for reform of the gambling legislation was carried out by my predecessor earlier this year. The consultation sought views on a change in the law to allow registered clubs and licensed premises to offer poker, bingo and other equal chance gaming, subject to limits on stakes and prizes. I am currently giving detailed consideration to the many complex issues raised in the consultation and the views expressed. I will make an announcement on the way forward for the gambling review in due course.

Housing Executive Properties: Maintenance Schemes

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all planned maintenance schemes for Housing Executive properties in the North Antrim area in each of the next three years, including which schemes include the replacement of single glazing with double glazing.

(AQW 3448/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The tables below detail the planned maintenance schemes for the next three years in the North Antrim area. From 2012/13 onwards all External Cyclical Maintenance schemes will include the replacement of single glazed windows with double glazed windows. It is not possible at this stage to provide estimated start dates for schemes starting in 2012/13 and 2013/14 until funding decisions are taken later in the financial year.

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Estimated Cost (£)	Start date
2011/12			
Clintyfinnan/Rasharkin ECM *	388	1,300,000	16.05.11

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Estimated Cost (£)	Start date
2011/12			
Glebeside Ph1 ECM *	167	382,000	Jan 2012
Ballintoy/Liscolman ECM *	18	36,000	Jan 2012
Ballee ECM *	363	773,000	02.08.11
Killane Pk/ Chichester East Kitchens	121	691,000	03.10.11
Ballykeel 2 Ph1 Kitchens	87	439,000	Mar 2012
Carnanny Heating	66	429,000	Jan 2012
Cushendall/Cushendun Heating	37	186,000	25.07.11
Lantarra/Lettercreeve Heating	101	656,000	03.10.11
BallymenaTown Heating	169	1,190,000	10.10.11
Ballymena North Heating	87	565,000	Feb 2012
Ballymena South Heating	79	592,000	Nov 2011
Ballymena Med-Rise Flats H&S	180	354,000	Jan 2012

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Estimated Cost (£)
2012/13		
Glebeside Ph2 ECM *	163	326,000
Ballycastle Town ECM *	22	44,000
Ballykeel 1/Killane Pk ECM *	130	426,000
Ahogill/Portglenone ECM *	158	316,000
BallycastleTown Kitchens	94	479,000
Bushmills/Liscoleman Kitchens	61	244,000
Ballykeel 2 Ph2 Kitchens	85	382,000
Ballee Ph2 Heating	80	520,000

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Estimated Cost (£)
2013/14		
Balnamore/Bendooragh ECM *	148	296,000
Bushmills ECM *	239	478,000
Broughshane/Millfield ECM *	200	400,000
Glebeside Ph2 Kitchens	102	408,000

* External Cyclical Maintenance scheme

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development how many householders in the South Antrim area have applied to the Boiler Replacement Scheme since the scheme was launched; and, of these, how many were successful.

(AQW 3478/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested. South Antrim is part of the areas covered by the Housing Executive's North East Grants Office which also covers East and North Antrim.

As at 30 September, the North East Grants Office has received 237 application forms, of which 128 have been deemed eligible. Of those, 67 formal approvals to commence replacements works have been issued.

Social Housing

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps the Housing Executive intend to take to increase the supply of social housing in the next four years in (i) Antrim; (ii) Ballyclare; (iii) Crumlin; (iv) Mallusk; and (v) Randalstown.

(AQW 3480/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The following schemes are included in the Social Housing Development Programme for South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency for 2011/12:-

Glenavy Road, Antrim	PSNI Site, Templepatrick	Belfast/Antrim (Muckamore Reprovision)	Norfolk Court, Antrim
55 units	5 units	20 units	12 units

The Housing Executive is currently drafting the Social Housing Development Programme for 2012/13 – 2014/15 and this will be submitted for my approval early next year, and will then be published.

Patients Diagnosed with Cancer

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether it is necessary for patients who are diagnosed with cancer and in receipt of benefits to attend a review board while they are undergoing treatment.

(AQW 3508/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Security Agency claimants who may be required to attend a review board are those claiming Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Income Support (paid on the grounds of incapacity) claimants undergoing reassessment and those claiming Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit.

Claimants who are claiming Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit for the prescribed disease Diffuse Mesothelioma are not required to undergo a medical examination where they have provided medical evidence to confirm the diagnosis.

Employment and Support Allowance claimants who are terminally ill cancer sufferers are fast tracked under Special Rules procedures. Employment and Support Allowance claimants under Special Rules will not have to attend a medical assessment and will be automatically placed in the Support Group. Claimantsundergoing certain forms of chemotherapy such as intravenous, intraperitoneal or intrathecal can be placed directly into the Support Group. Following a review, changes were made to the work capability assessment in March 2011 to provide that people waiting for, or between, courses of chemotherapy are also automatically included in the support group without the need for a face to face assessment. Professor Malcolm Harrington, an occupational health specialist is currently undertaking

a second independent review of the work capability assessment. Professor Harrington has asked Macmillan Cancer Support to consider whether further improvements are needed, including whether people receiving oral chemotherapy should be placed directly into the support group. Recommendations for any improvements arising from the review will be considered in due course

Existing Incapacity Benefit and Income Support (paid on the grounds of incapacity) claimants undergoing reassessment will be required to complete a medical questionnaire as part of the work capability assessment. Where sufficient medical evidence that the claimant is suffering from certain serious conditions including cancer is available, a healthcare professional can recommend that the claimant be placed directly into the Support Group and will not be required to attend a medical assessment

The Agency recognises the need to treat claimants suffering from cancer in a sensitive and sympathetic manner and has support arrangements in place.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many elderly people have been deemed eligible for the Boiler Replacement Scheme; and, of these, how many have had new boilers fitted.

(AQW 3510/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme offers a grant of up to £1,500 towards the cost of a new energy efficient boiler to eligible householders. To qualify a householder must be over 60 and in receipt of Rates Relief or over 70 and in receipt of Lone Pensioner Allowance but not Housing Benefit and have a boiler at least 15 years old. At 30 September, 504 application forms had been received from eligible applicants. 114 formal approvals to proceed with replacement works have been issued.

October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any easements that have been identified by his Department in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3546/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The outcome of the Monitoring Round, including details of easements identified by all Departments, was announced to the Assembly by the Finance Minister on 24 October 2011. My Department identified cash and non-cash easements totalling £7.19m; the details are shown in the table below.

Easements	
Cash	**£m**
Social Security Agency	2.58
Child Maintenance & Enforcement Agency	1.00
Urban Regeneration and Community Development Group	1.81
NON- CASH	
Social Security Agency	1.75
Child Maintenance & Enforcement Agency	0.05

Girdwood Site, North Belfast: Loss of 200 Housing Units

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development what alternative sites he has identified to compensate for the loss of 200 housing units on the Girdwood site in North Belfast from the Housing Programme.

(AQW 3569/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are plans for 172 new units of housing spread across 14 schemes in North Belfast in the current Social Housing Development programme this year. The full details of these can be found at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Oil Stamp Saving Schemes

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department plans to promote the existing Oil Stamp Saving Schemes.

(AQW 3576/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Oil Stamp Savings Scheme offer households an excellent means of budgeting for oil and I am delighted that so many Councils throughout Northern Ireland are now operating Oil Stamp Savings Schemes. Officials have already engaged in discussions with some Councils about a range of measures to tackle fuel poverty locally and plan to engage with all Councils in the near future.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to support people in fuel poverty whose properties are within Smoke Control Zones.

(AQW 3594/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department's primary tool in tackling fuel poverty is the Warm Homes Scheme. Eligible householders with solid fuel heating systems can apply to the scheme for assistance to install a new oil or gas central heating system. Within the social housing sector, the Housing Executive administers an annual Heating Replacement Scheme which replaces solid fuel systems with new oil or gas systems.

Demolishing Unwanted Flats and Houses

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development under what circumstances the Housing Executive must acquire planning permission prior to demolishing unwanted flats and houses.

(AQW 3630/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Currently under Northern Ireland planning arrangements, planning permission is not required for the demolition of buildings by the Housing Executive.

However, in order to comply with the requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, the Department of the Environment intends to bring forward proposals to revise its planning legislation so that where the demolition project constitutes Environmental Impact Assessment development an application for planning permission accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required.

It is anticipated that the new Direction on Demolition and associated regulations for permitted development would be in place by April 2012.

Cairngorm Drive and Shanlea Drive, Larne: Flats

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development when he intends to authorise the demolition of the fire-damaged flats at Cairngorm Drive and Shanlea Drive, Larne.

(AQW 3631/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am pleased to advise the member that I have now approved the demolition of these units and have attached the Press Release announcing this decision.

McCausland Gives the Go Ahead for Removal of Craigyhill Flats, Larne.

Social Development Minister, Nelson McCausland, today announced plans to remove flats which had become the focus of anti social behaviour in the Craigyhill area of Larne.

The plans will see 58 flats demolished in total; 34 flats at Cairngorm Road, 8 flats in Linn Road and 16 flats in Shanlea Drive.

Minister McCausland said: "This is an important day for the people of Craigyhill and the Linn Road estate. The demolition of these 58 flats will remove the blight of void and unlettable stock, enhance the environment and protect previous investment in the area. The completion of this project will see a much more pleasant and harmonious environment for the local residents by removing the source of anti-social behaviour which has proved a problem in the past."

The Housing Executive will now begin to contact all those directly affected by the demolition to outline exactly how they will be affected. An implementation plan will also be developed in consultation with the local community detailing how and when this work will be delivered.

Assisted Voluntary Sales Schemes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of (i) the viability of Assisted Voluntary Sales schemes; and (ii) whether lenders should be encouraged to implement the schemes.

(AQW 3645/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Although I have not made an assessment of such schemesI understand that assisted voluntary sales are exceptionally used by some lenders; mortgagors who cannot meet their mortgage commitments, sell their properties voluntarily and reach an agreement regarding any subsequent shortfall caused by negative equity.

(i) Although they can offer mutual benefits to both parties, in all cases,people with mortgage arrears should seek independent advice. (ii) I recently met with the Council of Mortgage Lenders and asked that they encourage lenders to develop and apply appropriate forbearance measures to assist borrowers, including those who voluntarily initiate sale of their property to resolve their debt and housing difficulties. It is important that lenders co-ordinate with advice agencies to mitigate against repossession.

Pension Credit Claimants in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development, given that the North Down area has the lowest number of pension credit claimants in Northern Ireland, what plans he has to increase the number of claimants in the North Down area.

(AQW 3647/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am committed to improving the uptake of all benefits and my Department, through the Social Security Agency, provides a range of services to make people aware of their benefit entitlement. These include an outreach service, a programme of targeted exercises involving offering a confidential benefits assessment to existing customers with potential additional entitlement, an online Benefits Adviser Service as well as a general assistance with advice and information through our network of local and centralised offices.

I am also pleased to announce that the 2011/12 Benefit Uptake Programme has profited from new investment in the form of a province-wide advertising campaign aimed at older people and an Innovation Fund of £375,000 to allow community and voluntary sector partners to test new ways of increasing uptake of benefits.

The Outreach to Older People strand during the 2009/10 Benefit Uptake Programme targeted older people in North Down as it was an area of high pensioner population but lower uptake of pensioner benefits. The campaign involved local press advertising and poster and leaflet distribution in health centres, GP surgeries, pharmacies, libraries and older peoples' centres. Benefit assessments over the telephone using a Freephone number and help with making a claim were also part of the campaign. In addition, in 2010/11 almost 3,000 older people in the North Down area received a letter inviting them to contact a Freephone Helpline operated by the advice sector partner, Citizens Advice Bureau, who carried out benefit assessments and gave advice on a range of services. Pensioners in North Down Borough Council received the second largest amount of annual benefits and arrears as part of the 2011/12 campaign accounting for nearly £750,000 of the £3.92 million generated.

Fuel Poverty Report

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the report by Christine Liddell 'Defining Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland- A Preliminary Review'.

(AQW 3679/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department's new Fuel Poverty Strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" instigated a review of the current definition of fuel poverty to ensure that it remained appropriate and inclusive. Professor Christine Liddell, University of Ulster working in collaboration with Dr Brenda Boardman, Emeritus Fellow, University of Oxford, was commissioned by the Department to carry out the review. The review has identified a core group of 75,000 households who are experiencing extreme fuel poverty and I have asked officials to review how we deliver energy efficiency and other measures in the future to assist those households most affected by fuel poverty.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people currently receive a Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 3700/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There were 187,029 recipients of Disability Living Allowance at 2 October 2011, the most recent figure available.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many motability cars issued in each of the last five years have been for claimants with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

(AQW 3765/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not held by my Department. People who receive the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance and decide to exchange all, or part of their allowance in return for a car enter into an agreement withMotability which is anindependent charity.

Motability

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many cases of enforcement action have been taken against people with motability cars in each of the last five years; and, of these, how many (i) agreements were terminated; and (ii) cars were withdrawn.

(AQW 3766/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Motability Scheme whereby people who receive the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance may exchange all or part of their allowance in return for a car is administrated by the independent charity Motability. Information on administrative matters can be obtained from Motability by writing to: Declan O'Mahony, Director, Motability, Warwick House, Roydon Road, Harlow, and Essex, CM19 5PX.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the costs incurred by rate payers as a result of housing benefit fraud in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 3771/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The estimated cost of Housing Benefit fraud in each of the last three financial years was published in the 2010/11 Department for Social Development Resource Accounts (laid before the Assembly on 1 July 2011) and is set out again in the table below. Costs are expressed as a percentage of the relevant benefit expenditure and are produced on a calendar year basis.

2008			**2009**			**2010**		
Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% overpaid	Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% overpaid	Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% overpaid
£3.0	£467.9	0.6	£5.0	£538.5	0.9	£1.7	£606.8	0.3

Small Pockets of Deprivation

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the areas in the Ards Peninsula that are designated as Small Pockets of Deprivation areas.

(AQW 3835/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently three areas designated as Small Pockets of Deprivation in the Ards Peninsula. These are: The Glen Estate Newtownards, the West Winds Estate Newtownards and the Bowtown Estate Newtownards.

Gambling Laws

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to change the gambling laws.

(AQW 3842/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A major consultation on proposals for reform of the gambling law was carried out by my predecessor earlier this year. I am currently giving detailed consideration to the many complex issues raised in the consultation and the views expressed. I will make an announcement on the way forward for the gambling review in due course.

Urban Development Grant Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many property owners and developers (i) applied for; and (ii) received an Urban Development Grant in the (a) Coleraine; (b) Portrush; and (c) Portstewart areas, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3862/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There have been no applications or grants paid for Urban Development schemes to property owners and developers in the Coleraine, Portrush and Portstewart areas to date. The Department has however received several expressions of interest and verbal enquiries in relation to properties and sites in Portrush since the scheme was extended to include regional towns outside of Belfast and Londonderry from 1 January 2011.

Discretionary Housing Payment

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what is the maximum amount payable under a discretionary housing payment.

(AQW 3881/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There is no maximum amount of discretionary housing payment. Each case is assessed on its individual circumstances. However, from a budget management perspective, the Housing Executive's Housing Benefit managers are advised to limit individual discretionary housing payment awards to £25 per week unless there are exceptional circumstances. Claims over £25 are referred to the Housing Benefit Policy Unit for a decision.

Helm Housing Association Interim Report

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development when he will publish his Department's Regulatory and Inspection Unit's interim report on the Helm Housing Association.

(AQW 3895/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The draft report in respect of the Helm Housing Association is being compiled at present and is due for release to the Association by 5th November for their comments. It is hoped to have the report finalised and ready for publication before the end of December 2011.

Green New Deal

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Green New Deal, whether his Department has any plans (i) to encourage social landlords to support their tenants during times of high energy prices; and (ii) to introduce schemes similar to the Social Homes Ecofit scheme in Manchester.

(AQW 3906/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Green New Deal is a programme for retrofitting the domestic building stock to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. A Cross Departmental Group which includes my department, DETI and DFP are in the process of examining options for the delivery of the programme.

Housing Associations support tenants by building energy efficient homes to 'Code 3and 4' including solar panels and heat recovery systems if possible. Economy 7 heating systems have in the main been removed and most dwellings now have gas or oil heating. In addition, a number of Housing Associations take advantage of Cosy Homes schemes to keep their houses properly insulated and draught-proofed, including cavity wall insulation. Housing Associations also ensure that their houses are well maintained through planned maintenance schemes. Some have changed their fuel providerswhich has resulted in tenants benefitting from a reduction in the service charges which covers the cost of lighting all communal areas of flats, and some are investigating the possibility of bulk purchasing fuel. The Housing Executive also administers the Heating Replacement Scheme which replaces inefficient heating systems within their housing stock.

One of the actions in my department's fuel poverty strategy entitled 'Warmer Healthier Homes' was to develop an Energy Brokering Scheme for Housing Executive tenants. The Executive are in the processing of developing a scheme and are confident that they will be in a position to market test a scheme by the end of March 2012

Housing Associations: Pursuit of Funds

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the pursuit of funds from the Housing Associations as stated in the 2011 Budget.

(AQW 3917/11-15)

Mr McCausland: During the development of Budget 2010 the Executive set out its requirement for the Department to access £80 million from the existing Housing Association Reserves. Housing Associations reserves are not reflective of their cash holdings as associations generally use available cash to minimise their borrowing levels. The Department does not have the authority to access the cash balances or reserves of Housing Associations but through grant rates can influence the levels of private finance which is contributed to new social housing provision.

A financial exercise determined that reducing the HAG by 15% (from 60% to 50%) would potentially realise in excess of £70 million over the four year period. A review of grant rates at the beginning of this year concluded that such a reduction would not jeopardise the delivery of the social housing programme and was therefore implemented from 1 April 2011. The budget acknowledges that there will be some more complex schemes which cannot be delivered at the reduced rates and which may require a Departmental adjustment. In the current year the reduced grant rates are estimated to lever in an additional £24 million and a total of £72 million over the Budget 2010 period.

In addition the Department is exploring the potential to facilitate the early redemption of long term loans provided to associations in an earlier funding regime. There is currently approximately £11 million outstanding from these loans and a business case is being developed for DFP approval regarding the required conditions of any proposal. It is anticipated that this proposal would generate the additional £8 million to meet the overall target.

Bloomfield Estate, Bangor: Pensioners' Bungalows

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the timescale for the maintenance work required to the pensioners' bungalows in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 3927/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An Economic Appraisal detailing the options for the work to improve these homes is currently being assessed. I recognise residents have waited for several years now for news of this improvement scheme and I plan to make an announcement on the way forwardin the coming weeks.

Halifax Savers Prize Draw

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development, given that people who have savings with the Halifax are being denied the opportunity to take part in the Halifax Savers Prize Draw, whether he intends to change the regulations to bring Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the UK.

(AQW 3943/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I would refer the Member to the answer to question AQW 3171 / 11-15, put down by Roy Beggs, Member for East Antrim.

The answer is contained in the Written Answers Booklet for week ending 21 October 2011.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Senate Chamber

Mr Swann asked the Assembly Commission whether the sound/speaker problems that were reported in the Senate Chamber on Tuesday 11 October have been resolved to such a standard that they will not recur.

(AQW 3293/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): After a thorough investigation, the Communications Office has been unable to identify that any sound/speaker problems were reported in the Senate Chamber on Tuesday 11 October 2011.

If you require any further information you can contact Gareth McGrath, Director of Information on 02890521311 or e-mail gareth.mcgrath@niassembly.gov.uk.

Childcare Voucher Scheme

Mr Beggs asked the Assembly Commission when Assembly Secretariat staff will be able to benefit from the tax efficient Childcare Voucher Scheme.[R]

(AQW 3536/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission provides the Assembly Childcare Allowance Scheme. The Scheme enables staff to apply for an allowance towards the cost of childcare while parents are at work and operates on the basis of a cash payment to eligible participants i.e. a "salary plus cash" arrangement. Payments made through the Scheme are subject to personal income tax and national insurance contributions. The Commission bears the cost of employers' national insurance contributions.

Under a Childcare Voucher Scheme, childcare can be purchased up to the value of £55 per week (£243 per month) that is exempt from personal income tax and national insurance contributions and from employer's national insurance contributions. An administration charge is normally payable. In the wider public sector, a childcare voucher scheme is normally on a "salary sacrifice" basis where a member of staff foregoes a portion of their salary in exchange for childcare vouchers. The Assembly Secretariat's payroll system does not currently facilitate salary sacrifice arrangements. However, this will be addressed through the implementation of a new Human Resource Management System (including payroll) during 2012.

Any decision to move from the present Assembly Childcare Scheme to a Childcare Voucher Scheme based on salary sacrifice would require further deliberation by the Assembly Commission.

Press Officers and Public Relation Officers

Mr Dallat asked the Assembly Commission to detail the (i) number; (ii) grade; and (iii) annual salary of press officers and public relation officers employed by the Assembly Commission in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3561/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission does not have posts titled press officer or public relations officer. However, the work of Communications Officers and Deputy Communications Officers focuses on raising awareness and understanding of the work of the Assembly and are included in this response. The numbers of staff in these categories are shown in the tables below. For data protection reasons the actual salaries of staff is not disclosed. The salary band for each post is provided.

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER – ASSEMBLY GRADE 5

	Number of Staff	Salary Band
As at 31 March 2009	1	£28,153 – £38,893
As at 31 March 2010	2	£32,643 - £38,893
As at 31 March 2011	2	£36,485 - £41,331

DEPUTY COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER – ASSEMBLY GRADE 6

	Number of Staff	Salary Band
As at 31 March 2009	2	£22,621 - £30,520
As at 31 March 2010	2	£27,764 - £30,520
As at 31 March 2011	2	£29,543 - £33,446

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 11 November 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Historical Institutional Abuse: Inquiry

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why there is a need for new legislation to deal with the inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse rather than using the Inquiries Act 2005.
(AQW 3145/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Attorney General's office has advised that Section 30 of the Inquiries Act 2005 currently places restrictions upon the period of time which can be examined by an inquiry, that is the period of time from 1973 to 1999. Many of the victims who have come forward to the Taskforce were in institutions before 1973 and we would therefore need to implement legislation to enable us to look at issues from 1945 on, if we were intending on holding a full statutory inquiry.

As outlined, the inquiry and investigation will take the form of an inquiry with statutory powers to compel people and documents and will also include non-statutory elements, including: a forum for recounting experiences and a research and investigative team leading to, and informing, a final report from the Investigation and Inquiry Panel to the Executive.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many planning applications have been processed by the Planning Appeals Commission in each of the last six years; and, of these, how many have been successful.
(AQW 3458/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, its Chief Commissioner has been asked to provide a response directly to you, and we understand that she has written to you in the following terms:

"I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question.

In the following table I have set out, the number of appeals received against refusals by Planning Service, the number of decisions issued, the number of appeals that have been allowed and the percentage of appeals allowed. These figures relate to the last 6 financial years.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12 (to date)
Appeals Received	2765	1493	515	515	435	229
Appeals Decided	973	1065	1411	1305	681	179
Appeals Allowed	362 (37%)	334 (31%)	487 (35%)	516 (40%)	226 (33%)	46 (26%)

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable".

Social Investment Fund: Consultation

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) why the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister was not invited to the launch of the consultation on the Social Investment Fund; (ii) how invitees were selected to attend the launch; and (iii) how the members of the Social Investment Zone Area Steering Groups that will administer the fund will be appointed.
(AQW 3834/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: After agreeing the Social Investment Fund (SIF) consultation document, we wrote to the Chair of the OFMDFM Committee on 27 September providing a copy of the document and inviting comments as part of the consultation process.

We organised the sectoral consultation launch in order to publicise the start of the consultation period as we have also been dealing with a significant number of enquiries from the voluntary and community sector.

Our officials have since briefed the OFMDFM Committee in more detail on the SIF prior to the undertaking of consultation events. The Committee received a full schedule of the public consultation events and were advised of their commencement on 26 October 2011. Officials have also undertaken to update the Committee during the consultation process.

Invites to the sectoral consultation launch event were issued, on OFMDFM's behalf, by NICVA and were to be members of the Ministerial led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum. Information about the launch had, however, been circulated wider than the Forum.

Proposals in respect of the Social Investment Zone Steering Groups can be found at para 3.02 of our public consultation document which can be viewed and downloaded at www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/sif-consultation-wdoc.doc.

Social Investment Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the £80 million Social Investment Fund will be allocated in advance of the January 2012 Monitoring Round.
(AQW 3845/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: £72 million of SIF is profiled in years 2, 3 and 4 of this CSR period and therefore cannot be spent in this financial year.

We are committed that the SIF will remain an £80 million fund. Therefore we have decided to re-profile at least £7 million of the spend available in year 1, into years 2, 3 and 4 to ensure more effective spend against area based plans.

Childcare Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the £12 million Childcare Fund will be allocated in advance of the January 2012 Monitoring Round.
(AQW 3847/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Proposals from a number of departments are currently under consideration and Junior Ministers will be briefing the OFMDFM Committee shortly on the quantum of bids across government, and the improvements which these will bring.

The additional £3m funding in the current year provides all departments who have a role in childcare, with a unique opportunity to deliver substantial progress towards improving the affordability and accessibility of good quality childcare provision for all parents, and to progress key actions identified in the OFMDFM policy and economic appraisal.

We are committed to ensuring sound investment, not only of the additional £3m in the current year, but of the full £12m across the term of this administration.

We plan to put proposals on the development of the childcare strategy to the Executive later this year.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Agricultural Wages Board

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what are the ongoing annual costs of the Agricultural Wages Board.
(AQW 3692/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The total cost of the Agricultural Wages Board in 2010-11 was £22,912.

Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has provided her with a copy of InterTradeIreland's 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Cooperation Report'; and for her assessment of this study.
(AQW 3730/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The InterTrade Irelands (ITI) Agri-Food study commenced in May 2009 and draft report was delivered to Steering group members in April 2010. My Department had representation on that Steering Board and as such responded to the draft report highlighting DARD's 'Focus on Food Strategy' commitments, resource implications, existing animal health collaboration and similarities between the 'Focus on Food' and ITI strategy documents.

ITI subsequently produced a revised report in June 2010 and met with the then DARD Minister in February 2011 to brief her on the report. Further comments on the revised report's content were forwarded to ITI officials following the Ministerial meeting and ITI officials also met with other key stakeholders at that time and incorporated comments into a further revision. DARD received a copy of the revised report in July 2011 for information only and were advised by ITI that the report was with their Sponsor Departments for comment and had not yet been signed off.

Since that time there has been no further correspondence from ITI or DETI regarding the report.

European Union Subsidy Payments

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the reported £4m clawback of further European Union subsidy payments, (i) to explain how this situation arose; (ii) how much of the reclaimed amount is being contested by her Department; and (iii) what steps have been taken to avoid similar losses in the future.
(AQW 3749/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) This disallowance arose from issues concerning the allocation of Single Farm Payment (SFP) entitlements in 2005 and the impact of this on 2005 – 2007 scheme years.

(ii) My Department is considering if there is merit in contesting this disallowance. However, there are likely to be significant practical difficulties in doing so as the onus will be on my Department to demonstrate that the Commission has either been manifestly unreasonable in its approach or has erred in its interpretation of EU legislation. This is much more difficult to demonstrate than that the Department's approach was satisfactory.

(iii) The disallowance arises from concerns raised by the Commission concerning the establishment of entitlements in 2005. Given the nature of the issues raised, it is not possible to take corrective

action on these now. For example, the issue of who should be allocated entitlements in a conacre situation is complex as evidenced by the ongoing CAP reform debate on active farmers and it would not be feasible to revisit decisions made on that issue back in 2005.

My immediate concern is the need to significantly reduce or eliminate future disallowance. My Department has a Compliance Programme in place to address disallowance issues and ultimately demonstrate to the Commission that we can provide an adequate level of assurance that we are correctly paying SFP and other area based schemes.

European Union Subsidy Payments

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the current claims by the European Union for the repayment of earlier subsidy payments; and whether there has been any success in reducing the amounts in question.
(AQW 3750/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This is a complex issue on which I propose to make a statement to the Assembly. The European Commission has, on 2 occasions, confirmed that it will recover money from the north of Ireland under the Clearance of Accounts procedure. In the first of these, on 15 July 2010, the Commission indicated that they would recover €33.7 million for the 2004 – 2006 scheme years in respect of area aids. The second, on 14 October 2011, confirmed a recovery of £754,144 for the 2005 scheme year and €3,806,563 for the 2006 and 2007 scheme years in relation to the allocation of SFP entitlements.

This money is not repaid to the European Commission. The Commission deduct the amounts from the money drawn down by the Member State to make payments under the various EU area aids schemes.

On 24 September 2010, the Department lodged a case with the European General Court. A notice of the case (t-453/10) was published in the Official Journal at the beginning of December 2010 and DARD is waiting for the Court to decide on this.

Renewable Energy Projects: Assistance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm owners in the North Down area have (i) applied for; and (ii) received assistance towards renewable energy projects on their land in each of the last three years.
(AQW 3829/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department has not received any applications or provided financial assistance towards renewable energy projects from farm owners in your constituency within the last 3 years.

No applications were made under the NI Rural Development Plan, Axis 3 measure 3.1 or the Biomass Processing Challenge Fund.

Fish Quota Allocations

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress was made during the discussions on fish quota allocations which took place in Brussels on 21 October 2011.
(AQW 3868/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: When I attended the October Agriculture and Fisheries Council, discussions focused on the Commission's proposals for fishing opportunities in Baltic Sea for 2012. After lengthy discussions and a compromise proposal from the Presidency, political agreement was reached on these by qualified majority. There were no discussions about stocks fished by the local fleet and these are scheduled to take place at Council on 15th and 16th December.

Flooding in the South Tyrone and Clogher Valley Areas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she will take to minimise the impact of future flooding in the South Tyrone and Clogher Valley areas.
(AQW 3882/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Rivers Agency is undertaking initial investigations into the sources of flooding at all of the properties affected in the South Tyrone and Clogher Valley areas. Where the cause of the flooding is apparent, for example blockages in a watercourse, immediate action is being taken and blockages removed. The potential for works to provide additional flood protection to properties is obviously limited by the current budgetary constraints under which the Agency operates. My Rivers Agency has a full programme of works to utilise their budget allocation so lead times are currently very long and all projects are subject to cost/benefit assessment and prioritisation against other demands.

Flood Area Hotspots

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will provide information on known flood area 'hot-spots' to keyholders and residents whose property may be affected by heavy rainfall and subsequent flooding.
(AQW 3884/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Information captured on past flood events has been publically available on the strategic flood map since its launch in November 2008. This map also shows the area considered to be at flood risk from rivers and the sea and indicates the increased risk due to predicted climate change.

As a direct response to the recent flooding I have asked my Rivers Agency to update the historic information to ensure it provides as accurate a representation as possible of known flooded areas.

In addition to the data about rivers and the sea I have also asked that the recently developed surface water flood map is made available to the public. This map shows area that may be at risk from flooding due to intensive rainfall events and will provide valuable information to the public.

Ards Peninsula Area: Farms

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of farms in the Ards Peninsula area.
(AQW 3926/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The June 2010 Agricultural Census found 624 farm businesses in the Ards District Council area.

Herd Register

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many successful cases have been brought against farmers for failing to keep a herd register in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3940/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

Convictions	Failure to keep a herd register
26/10/2006-25/10/2007	5
26/10/2007-25/10/2008	4
26/10/2008-25/10/2009	6
26/10/2009-25/10/2010	1
26/10/2010-25/10/2011	2

Strangford Lough Fishing Fleet

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration she has given to the interests of the Strangford Lough fishing fleet and the wider economic and tourism factors when deciding on the action plan for restoring mussels in the Lough.
(AQW 3944/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Fishing vessels are not restricted by my Department to operating in Strangford Lough and are able to move outside the lough as fishing opportunity presents. I am mindful however of the impact of this Department's conservation obligations on vessels operating within Strangford, initially with zoning of fishing methods under the Inshore Fishing Prohibition Regulations (NI) 1993, the later prohibition of mobile gear introduced in 2003, and the introduction of two non-fishing areas in 2011.

The horse mussel beds in Strangford Lough are a designated conservation feature under the Habitats Directive and are currently in serious decline. Competent authorities locally are obliged to protect and restore this important marine habitat, improving biodiversity including species of interest to commercial fishermen.

The 2011QUB report after the three year Modiolus project records further decline and makes recommendations for greater protection including a non-disturbance zone below the 10 metre contour across a wide area of the lough, with clear implications for fishing. However following an assessment of the impacts of pot fishing under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, and industry agreement to abide by a code of practice in the lough it is not my intention to introduce further restrictions at this stage, but Departments will closely monitor biological changes inside the closed area to determine their effectiveness. Officials in my Department work closely with fishermen's representatives on Strangford issues and I have asked them to examine mechanisms to assist the introduction of the code of practice.

Officials are currently drafting a revised Modiolus Restoration plan for agreement of Ministers of Agriculture and Environment, and we will present this to the Commission for their approval, but examining the report recommendations and recognising the backdrop of continued decline in biodiversity it is probable that we will face scrutiny of our existing management mechanisms and may be compelled to introduce greater protection. Thus I am sorry to say I cannot rule out future fishery restrictions.

Flooding that Damaged Premises in Tempo

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken to ensure that there is no repeat of the flooding that damaged premises in Tempo on Monday 17 October 2011.
(AQW 3971/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My DARD Rivers Agency responded to the flood event in Tempo on Monday 17 October 2011 and has since removed a section of an undesignated culvert that appeared partially blocked with gravel. Officials are currently carrying out an inspection of the watercourse network in the area to establish the cause the flooding and identify any other potential blockages. This investigation will assist in determining any other works that could be carried out to reduce the risk of another flood.

Tree Diseases

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether his Department has any plans to deal with tree diseases, and if so, to detail the diseases involved.
(AQW 3979/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has a programme of ongoing surveillance for quarantine plant pests and diseases which could threaten our woodlands.

Currently statutory programmes are being implemented to control outbreaks of disease in woodlands caused by two pathogens here; Phytophthora ramorum infects larch particularly, but can also cause disease in a range of conifer and broadleaved species, and Phytophthora lateralis that infects Lawson cypress specifically.

From August 2010 to date there have been confirmed outbreaks of Phytophthora ramorum in larch trees at eighteen individual sites in the north. Measures to control the disease have included the felling of some 360 hectares of trees, biosecurity measures, and aerial and ground surveys.

Following surveys in the summer and autumn Phytophthora lateralis has been confirmed in Lawson cypress at five forests and a number of private properties. Measures focusing on biosecurity and particularly the prevention of infected soil movement have been implemented at the sites.

In addition the disease Fireblight which primarily affects ornamental shrub species but can also infect some broadleaved trees is subject to annual surveys and statutory controls here.

The Forest Service is also aware that a plantation of Corsican pine in Co Down has been infected with Dothistroma septosporum, or red-band needle blight, a fungal disease of pines. While this is not a notifiable disease in a plantation situation it can significantly affect timber production of pine species. Forest Service is currently evaluating the impact.

Agricultural Wages Board

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total cost to the public purse of the Agricultural Wages Board in each of the last five years.
(AQW 4148/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The total cost of the Agricultural Wages Board in each of the last five years was in the region of:

2006-07	£22,640
2007-08	£21,420
2008-09	£24,810
2009-10	£24,560
2010-11	£22,910

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Odyssey Trust Company: Directors and Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 3065/11-15 and the assertion that the remuneration of the Odyssey Trust Company's (OTC) directors and staff 'is the sole responsibility of the OTC Trustees', (i) how this statement can be reconciled with the requirement in the Funding Agreement of 21 December 1998 that 'none of its Trustees, directors, employees or service providers are paid salaries, fees or emoluments which exceed reasonable and proper open market and arm's-length commercial rates'; (ii) how her Department satisfies itself that this obligation is being met; and (iii) for her assessment of whether the obligation is being met.
(AQW 3753/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): As stated in AQW 3065/11-15, 'OTC's Trustees are the non-executive Directors of the charity and do not receive any remuneration.' However, the OTC's Memorandum of Association also permits the Trustees to have 'reasonable out of pocket expenses'.

The extract from the Funding Agreement quoted in the question does not grant permission for the Trustees to receive remuneration, in breach of the Memorandum of Association (MOA).

Its emphasis and substance is on the obligation to ensure that anyone who is entitled to rightfully receive salaries, fees or emoluments should not be paid these in excess of proper open market and arm's-length commercial rates.

OTC's Trustees are clear on the requirements of both the MOA and the Funding Agreement. To ensure compliance with these the Trustees commissioned an independent report to consider this issue. Having carefully considered its findings they believe that the OTC's current salary levels are appropriate for an organisation of this size and complexity.

Libraries: Wireless Internet Service

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether any libraries currently offer a wireless internet service; (ii) what consideration has been given to providing this service in libraries; and (iii) for her assessment of the benefits of this service to library users.
(AQW 3873/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI have informed me that there is currently a wireless internet service in Bangor, Carrickfergus and Lisburn libraries. This service has been well received by customers and is beneficial for these users.

Libraries NI has commenced a procurement process for the replacement of their ICT systems and as part of this it is intended that the provision of wireless access will be extended.

Mobile Library Service

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, for each town or village in County Fermanagh where the mobile library visits, to detail (i) the number of registered users of the mobile library; (ii) the number of active users; and (iii) the number of books or other materials loaned out in each of the last four financial years.
(AQW 3875/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI do not record mobile library use on a stop by stop basis, therefore the following table shows the (i) total number of registered users; (ii) the total number of active users; and (iii) the total number of books or other materials loaned out in each of the last four financial years by the two mobile libraries serving Fermanagh.

Fermanagh Mobiles*	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Registered Borrowers	2,899	1,837	1,951	2,266
Active Borrowers	854	751	585	880
Issues	81,157	74,907	70,891	51,823

* Data relates to two mobile libraries which serve Fermanagh. Note that a small number of stops by these mobiles are in Tyrone.

Arts in the Strangford Constituency

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has invested in the arts in the Strangford constituency in the last five years; and to detail where this funding was applied.
(AQW 4039/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department doesn't directly provide funding for the arts, as funding is disbursed through the Arts Council. For information on arts funding in the Strangford constituency, you should contact the Arts Council directly.

DCAL does allocate Community Festivals funding to the local councils, but does not hold information at constituency level.

If you require a breakdown of arts related Community Festivals Funding in the Strangford constituency, you should contact the relevant councils directly.

Sport Matters Strategy

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department intends to encourage and facilitate private sector investment in the delivery of sports coaching, which was recognised as a key requirement in the Sport Matters Strategy.
(AQW 4065/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport Matters recognises that the private sector, along with other sectors, already invests substantial financial and human resources in the delivery of sport generally in the north of Ireland. Sport Matters also recognises that the private sector has a significant role to play in terms of investing in and providing sports related services including coaching. It further acknowledges that Government has a role in facilitating even greater private sector involvement by encouraging increased demand for sports services.

In order to help increase demand, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), through Sport Matters, is establishing a world class sports system for all people in the north of Ireland. To achieve this, DCAL, with the support of Sport NI, is currently overseeing the implementation of a Sport Matters Action Plan. This Action Plan has been developed, and is being taken forward, with the assistance of a range of sports partners and stakeholders in the public, voluntary and business sectors. It is expected that the actions being taken forward under the Plan will facilitate the delivery of all Sport Matters requirements including those relating to greater private sector involvement and investment in sport.

Lottery Funding to the 2012 Olympics

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been lost to sport in Northern Ireland as a result of the diversion of Lottery funding to the 2012 Olympics.
(AQW 4132/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In common with the other Devolved Administrations, the North of Ireland has been required to contribute Lottery proceeds as a key part of the public funding package for the Olympics. Sports Lottery funding for the north of Ireland has been reduced by £4.192m over the period 2009/10 to 2012/13.

Community Festivals Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the formula which determines the allocation of the Community Festivals Fund to District Councils.
(AQW 4147/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The allocations are determined on the basis of population distribution, with a 10% weighting applied for income deprivation.

The Noble Multiple Deprivation measure was previously used to calculate the 10% deprivation measure, but for 2011/2012 the Income Deprivation Domain MDM 2010 was used.

Department of Education

Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 3037/11-15, to outline the strategic planning area exercise, including (i) when it will be carried out; (ii) by whom; and (iii) what guidelines will be followed.
(AQW 3600/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Area planning will be fundamentally based on the Sustainable Schools Policy; the primary objective of the policy is to ensure that all children and young people get a high quality education in strong and vibrant schools that are educationally and financially viable and sustainable in the longer term.

The focus of area planning will be to determine the future needs of an area across all sectors using robust and verifiable data. Then to compare what is needed with what already exists to identify gaps and over provision. Once the need is determined the school managing authorities will consider how best to meet that need. The emphasis must be on a network of sustainable schools and maximise the use of the existing estate.

The Terms of Reference for Area Planning are currently being discussed between the Department, the Boards and CCMS. The dates for completion of the area planning phases will be included in the final Terms of Reference.

As outlined in my answer to AQW 3037/11-15, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and other sectors to co-ordinate this exercise.

As stated above the exercise will be based on the Sustainable Schools Policy and will be steered by guidance that will issue from my Department in due course.

Irish-medium Education Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on how recommendation 2 of the Irish-Medium Education Report is being implemented.
(AQW 3617/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In line with Recommendation 2 of the Review of Irish Medium Education the Department has revised its policy on the funding and development of Irish Medium pre-school provision. In considering requests for new statutory Irish Medium provision the Department only takes into account the overall level of existing Irish Medium provision in both the statutory and voluntary/private sectors when determining the need for additional Irish Medium places. The same consideration is applied by PEAGs when allocating funded places in the voluntary/private sector.

However, the Department's policy is not to displace good quality pre-school provision already in existence, with pre-school provision in an alternative setting. Therefore the Department may not, unless exceptional circumstances pertain, support a proposal to establish or increase provision in an area where there is a sufficient level of quality pre-school provision (irrespective of the provider).

Capital Budget

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the projected capital budget for new builds for existing schools and new school builds in each of the next three years.
(AQW 3705/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In each of the next three financial years the total gross capital budget is £104.1m, £108.4m and £183.4m. A list of major capital projects currently on site with projected expenditure profiles over the next three financial years is detailed in the table below.

Project	2012/13 Total £000'S	2013/14 Total £000'S	2014/15 Total £000'S
Magherafelt H.S.	895	0	0
Carrick P.S.	752	0	0
Coranny & Cornagague P.S.	133	0	0
Dromintee P.S.	667	35	0

Project	2012/13 Total £000'S	2013/14 Total £000'S	2014/15 Total £000'S
Scoil Na Fuiseoige P.S	640	0	0
St Columba's P.S.	1,168	0	0
St Oliver Plunkett P.S.	100	31	0
St Colman's P.S.	1,037	47	0
St Joseph's P.S.	13	0	0
Magherafelt P.S & N.S	2,756	0	0
St Mary's P.S.	1,287	46	0
Taughmonagh P.S.	525	0	0
Bangor Grammar	8,287	285	0
Strathearn GS	3,554	5,165	1,282
	£21,814	**£5,609**	**£1,282**

New proposals for capital spend will be dependent on the outcome of the work I recently announced to develop a new process for capital investment and planning to ensure our schools' estate meets the needs of children and represents the most effective use of taxpayers' money.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what mechanisms are in place to verify that recipients of Education Maintenance Allowance are living at the home of a parent or guardian as stated in their application.
(AQW 3780/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme was introduced jointly, in September 2004, by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education. While my Department holds a small budget to assist schools with their role in the administration of EMAs, DEL holds the main budget in respect of the scheme. The administration and payment of the allowance is carried out by the Student Loans Company through a Service Level Agreement with DEL.

I have been advised by DEL that a home address check is carried out on all applications by obtaining the relevant household Tax Credit Award Notification form and matching the stated address against the address supplied by the student in the Education Maintenance Allowance application form. If the Tax Credit Award Notification form is not available, a household utility bill issued within the last three months is obtained to make the verification check.

I understand that DEL also funds a non means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance which is paid to those young persons who are participating in the Training for Success programme. The Department of Education has no responsibility for this scheme.

Primary Schools: Cost of Repairs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the total cost of repairs to primary schools in the 2010/11 financial year.
(AQW 3836/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have provided details of maintenance spend, including delegated spend by primary schools, in the controlled and maintained sectors for the 2010/11

financial year and these are summarised in the table below. The expenditure information available does not distinguish between maintenance and repairs.

	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Total
(£000s)	4,642	3,846	3,791	3,881	3,401	19,561

Source: Education and Library Boards

Grant-maintained integrated primary schools have responsibility from within their LMS budgets to maintain their premises, therefore, this expenditure is not readily available and is not included in the above table.

Sports Teaching Programme

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what assistance is provided to schools to promote and develop football through the Sports Teaching Programme.
(AQW 3852/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Curriculum Sports Programme is delivered on behalf of the Department of Education by the Irish Football Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association. The programme does not focus specifically on the skills associated with either football or Gaelic games but rather aims to develop the generic physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils through participation in enjoyable sports activities. The Department of Education has made £1.5 million available for the Curriculum Sports Programme in the current financial year and the programme is currently being delivered by 61 coaches to over 36,000 primary school children in 563 schools. I have no plans to introduce coaches from a rugby background.

Sports Teaching Programme

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what assistance is provided to schools to promote and develop rugby through the Sports Teaching Programme.
(AQW 3853/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Curriculum Sports Programme is delivered on behalf of the Department of Education by the Irish Football Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association. The programme does not focus specifically on the skills associated with either football or Gaelic games but rather aims to develop the generic physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils through participation in enjoyable sports activities. The Department of Education has made £1.5 million available for the Curriculum Sports Programme in the current financial year and the programme is currently being delivered by 61 coaches to over 36,000 primary school children in 563 schools. I have no plans to introduce coaches from a rugby background.

Sports Teaching Programme

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what assistance is provided to schools to promote and develop Gaelic sports through the Sports Teaching Programme.
(AQW 3854/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Curriculum Sports Programme is delivered on behalf of the Department of Education by the Irish Football Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association. The programme does not focus specifically on the skills associated with either football or Gaelic games but rather aims to develop the generic physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils through participation in enjoyable sports activities. The Department of Education has made £1.5 million available for the Curriculum Sports Programme in the current financial year and the programme is currently being delivered by 61 coaches to over 36,000 primary school children in 563 schools. I have no plans to introduce coaches from a rugby background.

Priorities for Youth Document

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education when the 'Priorities for Youth' document will be published; and to provide a timetable for its implementation.
(AQW 3889/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Officials are currently engaged in a process for developing 'Priorities for Youth' which should be available for my consideration before the end of this calendar year. When I have approved it, the document will then be passed to the Committee for Education for its consideration and comment, before being prepared and published for public consultation for a period of not less than 12 weeks.

Following public consultation, officials will revise and finalise the 'Priorities for Youth', taking into account the opinions expressed by consultees. Subject to my final approval, the document, including a timetable for its implementation, will then be published.

Schools: Budget for Newbuilds

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to recapitalise part of its budget to increase resources for new builds for schools.
(AQW 4004/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The resource and capital budget allocations for education across Budget 2011-15 have produced major challenges and it is clear that difficult choices will have to be made. With this in mind I have commissioned officials to carry out a review of resource budget allocations across years 2, 3 and 4 of the Budget period with a view to identifying further savings. Until this work has been completed I do not intend to seek Executive approval to reclassify resource funding to capital. However I do fully intend to work with my Executive colleagues in the months and years ahead to help alleviate pressures on both the resource and capital budget for education.

At this time, proposals for new school builds will be managed from the capital allocations agreed for Budget 2011-15.

Moving forward, proposals for new builds will, in the main, be determined by the outcome of the work on strategic area planning that I have commissioned with the Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with CCMS and other school sectors.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.
(AQW 4005/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: You will be aware from my recent Statement to the Assembly that I have commissioned a strategic area planning exercise based on each Education & Library Board area to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Previously identified projects, such as that for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed and may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. No school building project will be looked at in isolation but must be considered in the context of the wider area.

Department for Employment and Learning

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.
(AQW 3606/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): In the period 1 October 2010 to 30 September 2011 the travel costs incurred by the Minister and departmental officials were as follows:

(i)	Minister:	
	1 October 2010 to 15 May 2011	£6,271.18
	16 May 2011 to 30 September 2011	£999.86
(ii)	Department officials:	£732,098.99

US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how the US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership will promote renewable energy targets.
(AQW 3800/11-15)

Dr Farry: The aim of the US-Ireland R&D Partnership is to increase the level of collaborative R&D, across the United States, Ireland and Northern Ireland, that will generate valuable discoveries and innovations which are transferable to the marketplace, or will lead to enhancements in health promotions, disease prevention and healthcare.

Until now, the priority areas for research collaboration have been restricted to cystic fibrosis, diabetes, sensor technology and nanotechnology. However, the tri-national Steering Group, which oversees the work of the Partnership, has recently taken the strategic decision to add the further priority areas of telecommunications and energy/sustainability. It will be my Department's responsibility to provide the Northern Ireland contribution to the funding of successful projects in these new areas.

Critically, the decision to include energy/sustainability was influenced by the fact that Invest NI is pro-actively targeting the global opportunities in renewable energy to ensure that NI businesses are well positioned to exploit these opportunities rather than its potential to promote renewable energy targets. However, I firmly believe that the energy-related projects, which will come forward for support in the future, will have the potential to make a positive impact on these targets, especially given the dual focus of the Partnership on scientific excellence and societal relevance.

Step Ahead Programme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there are any plans to end the Step Ahead Programme, and if so, to detail the reasons.
(AQW 3960/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is with great reluctance that my Department has paused recruitment to the Step Ahead strand of the Steps to Work (StW) programme from November 2011. This decision is due to the continuing rising demand for all Steps to Work provision and the limited budget available this year.

When Step Ahead was initially introduced in September 2009 it was announced that it was a temporary initiative for a two year period so it was due for review at this time. As the employment position has not improved in the last two years I would like to continue with Step Ahead and, subject to available resources, I intend to recommence recruitment as soon as possible.

My Department is also seeking funds from the Social Protection Fund for a variant of Step Ahead which would aim to assist young unemployed, those affected by the re-assessment of Incapacity Benefit and lone parents affected by changes in benefit regulations.

Those currently participating on Step Ahead will, of course, be able to complete the programme.

Job Centres

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of job centres and their locations.
(AQW 3973/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are 8 JobCentres in Northern Ireland which are located in Ballynahinch, Bangor, Belfast North (Chichester Street), Cookstown, Downpatrick, Newcastle, Newtownards and Strabane. In addition, the Department has a network of 27 Jobs and Benefit Offices.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

NI Screen Productions

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding her Department has allocated to NI Screen productions in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 3048/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Northern Ireland Screen Commission (NI Screen) was established to accelerate the development of a dynamic and sustainable film and television industry in Northern Ireland by integrating industrial, educational and cultural policies and actions. It is the lead body in developing the film and television industry in Northern Ireland.

NI Screen is primarily funded by Invest Northern Ireland, the Department of Culture Arts & Leisure and the British Film Institute. It is delegated by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to administer lottery funding for film in Northern Ireland. It also administers the Irish Language Broadcast Fund and the Ulster Scots Broadcast Fund.

My Department through Invest NI is the largest single funder of NI Screen and over the past five years has committed £25.7m to the development of the screen industries in Northern Ireland; this includes funding of £6.3m for the current year 2011 – 2012.

The following table illustrates Invest NI funding that has been allocated by NI Screen to production activity over the past five years in Northern Ireland. The table also includes awards made to companies based in other locations but where production activity took place in Northern Ireland. For example, of the £10.8m that relates to London, it is estimated that £4.9m (45%) of this was spent in Northern Ireland.

Constituency/Location of production Company	Amount Awarded £
Belfast East	610,000
Belfast North	217,359
Belfast South	4,042,761
North Down	310,000
Foyle	580,384
Dublin	711,333
London	10,802,732

Indigenous Businesses

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2508/11-15, given InvestNI's focus on export businesses, (i) for her assessment of the level of support available for non-exporting indigenous businesses; and (ii) to provide an estimate of their contribution, in terms of the number of jobs and Gross Domestic Product, to the economy.
(AQW 3276/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) In line with the Executive's economic objectives, Invest NI's role is to grow the local economy and increase the productivity of Northern Ireland businesses. This is principally achieved by supporting new and existing businesses to compete internationally, and by attracting new investment to Northern Ireland. As such, Invest NI's support is primarily focused on those businesses that can make the greatest contribution to growing our economy - these tend to be companies which have ability to grow and drive productivity and are keen to export outside Northern Ireland.

However, those businesses which fall outside these categories can still benefit from many of Invest NI's programmes and services. This includes energy and environmental efficiency support, comprehensive business information services and information and communications technology support.

Invest NI's information website, nibusinessinfo.co.uk, also provides free access to key information, advice, funding and training. With over 5,000 pages of relevant information, the site is written by business people for business people and offers extensive knowledge in one online location.

Invest NI offers access to comprehensive databases, directories, specialised business and global market information and can help businesses find the specific market information they need to grow their business. It also maintains a state-of-the-art information centre that provides practical and independent advice on a range of information and communication technology, technical, energy and environmental issues.

(ii) It is not possible to provide a complete estimate of the contribution of non-exporting indigenous businesses to the NI economy. However, the Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry, which covers most of the business economy, estimated that there were some 196,000 employees (41 percent of employees) in such businesses in 2009. Non-exporting indigenous businesses were also estimated to contribute approximately £5 billion of business Gross Value Added (29% of such activity) to the NI economy in that year.

Independent Retail Sector

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much the independent retail sector contributes to the economy; (ii) how many independent retailers have closed in the last year, broken down by constituency; and (iii) what action her Department is taking to support independent retailers.
(AQW 3277/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The available data doesn't distinguish independent retailers from any other retailer, while the same data is not available by constituency. However, the vast majority of retailers are small (97.7% have less than 50 employees) and so information is provided, where possible, for the retail sector and by Local Government District.

(i): GVA for the retail and wholesale sector was £3,651m in 2008 – equivalent to 13% of GVA in that year.

(ii): The latest available data from the Office for National Statistics, set out in Table 1 below, gives statistics on the number of retail enterprises, by District Council area, that closed during 2009.

(iii): My department has made clear its commitment to support the economy. This will benefit business in all sectors. Invest NI works with businesses across the private sector, supporting to people to set up their own business, helping new and existing businesses grow and move into new markets home and abroad, while also being a vital source of advice to all business.

Across the Executive Departments there are many examples of support for retailers. For example, around 5,000 retail premises benefit by more than £2m via small business rate relief, with proposals afoot to extend this scheme and support an additional 4,000 small retail premises. In addition, DSD is leading in the regeneration of our towns and city centres with a range of initiatives to enhance investment, footfall and the attractiveness and vitality of these commercial hubs.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF ENTERPRISE CLOSURES BY DISTRICT COUNCIL ARES FOR THE RETAIL SECTOR, 2009

District Council	Business Closures
Antrim	25
Ards	35
Armagh	20
Ballymena	25
Ballymoney	5
Banbridge	15
Belfast	85
Carrickfergus	5
Castlereagh	20
Coleraine	20
Cookstown	10
Craigavon	25
Londonderry	25
Down	25
Dungannon	20
Fermanagh	25
Larne	15
Limavady	15
Lisburn	40
Magherafelt	20
Moyle	5
Newry and Mourne	35
Newtownabbey	30
North Down	20
Omagh	25
Strabane	15
Total	**605**

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest 5and thus may not add to totals.
Figures relate to business deaths

Invest NI: Jobs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2786/11-15 and 2788/11-15, given that the information requested is not readily accessible, to detail (i) how her Department audits (a) the success of InvestNI in attracting sustainable jobs; (b) the number of jobs promoted which translate into actual jobs; (c) whether such jobs last; and (d) the cost of each created job; and (ii) if she will require such information to be collated and made readily available.
(AQW 3641/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Following a recommendation by the Independent Review of Economic Policy, DETI, as the funding department, is taking a leading role in reporting the strategic performance of Invest NI. As such, Invest NI works closely with DETI and statistical staff within DFP to ensure data availability and accuracy.

Unfortunately, system constraints mean that the provision of precise 'point in time' job creation data to answer Assembly Questions is only possible following an extensive exercise which would involve disproportionate cost. In addition, by its nature 'point in time' job creation information is complex and open to misinterpretation without an in-depth understanding of the job creation profile of the individual projects that have been supported during the time period in question.

Importantly not all grant offered by Invest NI is paid out to assisted businesses. Each project that is offered assistance by Invest NI is intensively monitored to ensure financial assistance is only paid out to companies based on actual jobs created within the control period specified in the Letter of Offer. In addition, if the original number of jobs promised by a project fail to be completely implemented, then Invest NI is free to consider its options with regards to seeking clawback of any assistance paid.

The important constraint to be borne in mind when analyzing job creation is the job creation profile of any given project, i.e. any supported project will have a lead time between the assistance being granted, to the project's full implementation and all jobs being created. For example, a project which is offered assistance in 2011 to create 300 jobs may not actually have created all of these jobs for up to five years depending on the company's implementation plan. This is further complicated by the fact that at present, Invest NI has some 1,500 employment related live Letters of Offer in process, each of which has its own implementation plan, job creation profile, delivery date and control period. This underlines the complexity of providing accurate and specific figures on actual jobs created at any given period in time.

With regards to job sustainability, a business in receipt of assistance from Invest NI is obliged to provide project monitoring information up to the end of the post-project evaluation. This is normally within a three-year period from project inception. Information relating to the sustainability of jobs would, therefore, not be available beyond this period. However, clawback options will also be considered by Invest NI if jobs created are subsequently lost within a project's specified control period.

Invest NI is currently developing systems in order to make such information more readily available in future. However, even when these systems are put in place, difficulties will remain with interpreting such data given the intricacies and complexities involved due to the breath and scale of the Invest NI Job creation profile at any one point in time.

Homecoming Year for Northern Ireland

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department, the NI Tourist Board and other relevant bodies have assessed the possible tourism benefits of a 'homecoming year' for Northern Ireland similar to 'The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming' in the Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 3712/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I recently launched ni2012; our time, our place. This exciting initiative will see a year long programme of major international and national events showcasing Northern Ireland on a world stage and providing significant economic benefits. Along with plans in 2013 for the World Police and

Fire Games and Londonderry UK City of Culture, these two years are anticipated to bring an additional £140million into the economy.

The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has had any engagement with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport about the Irish Government's plans for "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming" in 2013 and any plans to progress it on an all-island basis.
(AQW 3713/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I recently met with Minister Varadkar. We discussed a range of tourism issues including the UK City of Culture and The Gathering.

The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has had any engagement with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport about the Derry~Londonderry UK City of Culture celebrations in 2013 being an integral part of 'The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming'.
(AQW 3714/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I recently met with Minister Varadkar. We discussed a range of tourism issues including the UK City of Culture and The Gathering.

Strategic Energy Framework Implementation Plan

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that action number ten of the Strategic Energy Framework implementation plan is to support the development of a range of renewable technologies, why her Department has rejected the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment's recommendation in its renewable energy inquiry to set targets for electricity from sources other than wind.
(AQW 3720/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department's 40% target is a market led, technology and geographically neutral target.

It will be for the market to bring forward the most cost effective technologies and this is already being seen with on shore wind. In a time of financial constraint it is vital for us to focus on those technologies and projects which are capable of providing the most cost-effective and significant contribution to achievement of the 2020 target and this must be determined by the market. This is consistent with other areas of the UK, none of which have technology specific targets.

The UK Renewables Roadmap, which covers Northern Ireland, identifies the eight technologies which have either the greatest potential (more than 90%) to help meet the 2020 target in a cost effective and sustainable way, or offer the greatest potential for the decades that follow. These eight technologies are on shore wind, off shore wind, marine, biomass electricity, biomass heat, ground and air source heat pumps and renewable transport.

Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total expenditure on InterTradeIreland's 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Cooperation Report'.
(AQW 3729/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The total expenditure on the InterTradeIreland Agri- Food Report has been £75,000 (excluding VAT).

Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has provided the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development with a copy of InterTradeIreland's 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Cooperation Report'; and if not, when she will provide her with a copy.
(AQW 3731/11-15)

Mrs Foster: InterTradeIreland officials presented a copy of the 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross Border Cooperation Report' to the previous DARD Minister, Michelle Gildernew in February, 2011.

InterTradeIreland Programmes

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which InterTradeIreland programmes are currently oversubscribed; and whether she will provide additional funding to address this issue and to ensure that businesses can continue to avail of these programmes.
(AQW 3732/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There continues to be healthy demand across all of InterTradeIreland's trade and innovation programmes. The number of participants on these programmes are on target and within budget for the year to date.

The InterTradeIreland Corporate Plan and Business Plan which contain the targets and budget for the year have been agreed by the sponsor Departments in accordance with joint planning and budgetary guidance.

Home Heating Oil Prices

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will establish a regulator for home heating oil prices.
(AQW 3734/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no plans to extend the powers of the independent regulator.

The Office of Fair Trading report published on 18 October 2011, on the competitiveness of the UK energy market for customers not connected to the gas grid, did not see any justification for price regulation in Great Britain or Northern Ireland on competition grounds.

Quinn Insurance in Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the discussions she has had with the relevant organisations regarding the security of jobs at Quinn Insurance in Enniskillen given the figures emanating from the company on the number of quotations and new customers.
(AQW 3746/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As Enterprise Minister, my top priority in any discussions has been to ensure every effort was being made to secure the jobs at Quinn Insurance in Enniskillen. I understand that the sale of Quinn Insurance to a Liberty Mutual led joint venture is at an advanced stage and that, if successful, this will ensure the continuance of the business and employment in Enniskillen. I welcome any resolution which will retain the vital investment and employment in Enniskillen and allow for the possibility of expansion in future years.

Petroleum Licences: Applications

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the applications for petroleum licences which are currently awaiting approval from her Department.
(AQW 3793/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are no applications for Petroleum Licences currently awaiting approval from my Department.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will conduct and publish a life cycle analysis before any further hydraulic fracturing takes place.
(AQW 3795/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Companies wishing to carry out hydraulic fracturing operations require permission from several regulatory authorities including my Department and the Department of the Environment. Technical, environmental, safety and planning considerations will be taken into account when assessing any applications received. Life cycle analysis (LCA) is not currently one of the tools used in this type of assessment and my Department has no plans to conduct an LCA for this process.

InterTradeIreland's Go-2-Tender Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the economic benefits of InterTradeIreland's Go-2-Tender programme.
(AQW 3799/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The aim of the Go-2-Tender Programme is to give businesses the confidence, knowledge and skills to tender successfully for public sector procurement contracts, a market which is estimated to be worth £16 Billion. In the latest phase of Go-2-Tender, the programme has delivered 39 two-day workshops in venues across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. More than 630 company delegates have attended these workshops.

During 2010, Go-2-Tender workshops took place in both jurisdictions.

A total of 116 companies attended the events, with sectors as diverse as Tradeable Services, Engineering, Construction and ICT represented.

In 2010, companies who had participated on Go-2-Tender directly attributed total additional sales of £15.5 million to the skills and knowledge they had developed on the public procurement market through this programme.

InterTradeIreland

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work InterTradeIreland is undertaking to benefit companies in the South Antrim area.
(AQW 3801/11-15)

Mrs Foster: InterTradeIreland's remit is such that the Body does not specifically target geographic areas. The Body's broad range of programmes can be accessed by companies throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

InterTradeIreland has had participating companies from every county and every city in Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland, on its programmes.

InterTradeIreland

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action InterTradeIreland is taking to build relationships between small and medium-sized enterprises and universities.
(AQW 3802/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A number of the Body's programmes including the 'FUSION' programme encourages business linkages to drive innovation, including building relationships between SME's and third level institutions.

The Programme provides companies who have technology based needs, the opportunity to work in a three way partnership. This involves the company, a university, and a high calibre science/technology graduate with the objective of developing new products or processes.

From 2002 to date there have been 329 FUSION projects of which 105 have been Northern Ireland companies with 70% of participating companies in the latest phase of FUSION first-time innovators.

Local Anniversaries

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what local anniversaries the Tourist Board plans to market in 2012; and to outline the potential benefit to the local economy.
(AQW 3803/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I recently launched ni2012; Our Time, Our Place. This exciting initiative will see a year-long programme of major international and national events, showcasing Northern Ireland on a world stage and providing significant economic benefits.

In 2012 the key anniversary that will be promoted is the anniversary of the maiden voyage of Titanic. This will also showcase the new Titanic Belfast visitor attraction and the significant DETI funding that was invested in this project, as well as the wider Titanic and Maritime Belfast Signature Project.

Collectively, ni2012: Our Time Our Place, together with the plans in 2013 including the World Police and Fire Games and Londonderry UK City of Culture, will bring significant economic benefit to the local economy. Overall by 2015 it is anticipated that the programme will bring an additional £140 million into the economy and support over 3,500 new jobs.

Quinn Group

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the discussions she has had with the Anglo Irish Bank or the Irish Minister for Finance regarding the on-going uncertainty over jobs within the Quinn Group.
(AQW 3808/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I maintained close contact with the Irish Minister for Finance following the Quinn Group going into receivership in an effort to lessen the impact on employment within the Group.

In relation to the future stability of Quinn Group, my Department will continue to work to support investment and secure employment in light of the financial restructuring of the Group. To this end I have instructed my officials, from both DETI and Invest NI, to maintain close contact with the new CEO of Quinn Group, Paul O'Brien, to secure the best possible outcome for the employees of the Quinn Group and the economy.

I have not had any discussions with the Anglo Irish Bank.

Single Electricity Market

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much electricity is currently being generated compared to each of the last five years; (ii) for her assessment of how much any reduction is a product of the Single Electricity Market; and (iii) what is the impact of any reduction on the postalised tariffs that are applicable to the gas transmission pipelines and subsequently gas prices.
(AQW 3815/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) Electricity generated is linked to demand, and in each of the past 5 years (including 2011 to date) relevant information in GWh is as follows:

	Demand	Moyle (Import)	North/South (Export)	NI Generation
2007	9182.60	1727	-1316	8771.60
2008	9256.80	544.772	-593.644	9305.67

	Demand	Moyle (Import)	North/South (Export)	NI Generation
2009	8967.13	1976.871 -796.944	7787.20	
2010	9210.35	2297.249	-409.552	7322.65
2011 (to Sept 11)	6644.85	1769.39	-599.02	5474.48

Source: System Operator for Northern Ireland

It should be noted that the above electricity demand figures include generation in Northern Ireland, net imports from GB via the Moyle interconnector and net exports to the Republic of Ireland.

(ii) In the first year of the Single Electricity Market's operation there was an increase in Northern Ireland generation. The subsequent reduction in Northern Ireland generation has been influenced by the import of electricity through the Moyle Interconnector and by a reduction in demand due to the economic downturn.

(iii) It is not possible to determine the impact of the Single Electricity Market on gas transmission volumes as such volumes are impacted by many other factors including the weather, the level of economic activity, relative fuel prices and connections to the gas network.

Gas Passing Through the Transmission Pipelines

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much gas is currently passing through the transmission pipelines in comparison with each of the last five years; and what impact this is having on gas prices.
(AQW 3816/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Annual gas demand in Northern Ireland for each of the last 5 years, and the projected gas demand for the current year, is as follows (the gas year runs from 1 October to 30 September):

Annual Gas Demand (Actuals in GWhs)

Gas Year 2006/07	19,697
Gas Year 2007/08	17,913
Gas Year 2008/09	16,500
Gas Year 2009/10	15,746
Gas Year 2010/11	16,151

Forecast Gas Demand (in GWhs)

Gas Year 2011/12	16,583

The postalised tariff for gas transmission in Northern Ireland accounts for between 6% and 8% of the final unit price of gas paid by domestic consumers in Northern Ireland and only 25% of the postalised tariff is in the form of a commodity based charge. Therefore, the overall impact of any year on year changes in gas transmission volumes is very small. By way of example, the Utility Regulator has advised that a 1% change in transmission volumes would lead to a 0.25% change in the level of transmission charges. For a domestic gas consumer, this would result in a 0.02% change in unit gas prices.

Smart Grid Technology

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any plans her Department has to explore the use of smart grid technology; and for her assessment of whether smart

electricity metering would help households and businesses save money on energy costs and reduce fuel poverty.
(AQW 3821/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has explored the use of smart grid technology with a wide range of stakeholders and at present is working with the Utility Regulator on the development of a cost benefit analysis for smart metering in Northern Ireland.

The EU Third Internal Energy Package (IME 3) requires a cost benefit analysis on intelligent metering to be completed by September 2012. At present we are on target to complete the cost benefit analysis at the beginning of 2012. Once I receive, and have considered, the completed cost benefit analysis I will announce my policy position on smart metering as early as possible in the New Year.

In the meantime however the Utility Regulator has two small smart meter trials in their early stages. These focus on technology and smart grid application, and, customer behaviour and education, with a specific focus on how smart meters could help customers vulnerable to fuel poverty.

MTV European Music Awards Aftershow Events

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the problems surrounding licensing and the opening hours for the MTV European Music Awards aftershow events, whether she has discussed with the Minister for Social Development ways in which to ensure that Northern Ireland is as competitive and attractive as other cities when competing to host such prestigious entertainment events.
(AQW 3825/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Officials from my Department and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) maintained close contact with counterparts in the Department for Social Development, and also Belfast City Council (BCC), in the run up to the MTV Europe Music Awards.

I am pleased to say that the Awards provided an excellent opportunity to showcase Belfast and Northern Ireland to more than 520 million homes worldwide. In terms of bidding for major music events, Belfast has a unique music offering, both in terms of its music, its talent and its venues. NITB, BCC and a range of other key stakeholders are pro-actively targeting and bidding for many major events and the MTV European Music Awards provides the perfect message that Belfast is a viable and attractive option.

InterTradeIreland's Elevate Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many companies in each constituency currently avail of InterTradeIreland's Elevate Programme.
(AQW 3863/11-15)

Mrs Foster: InterTradeIrelands' Elevate Programme is in the process of being rolled out. Since mid-October 2011, two Northern Ireland companies have joined the Elevate Programme as participants.

The Assembly Constituency breakdown is as follows:

Belfast West	1
Newry and Armagh	1

InterTradeIreland's Fusion Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many companies in each constituency currently avail of InterTradeIreland's Fusion Programme.
(AQW 3864/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently 25 Northern Ireland companies participating on the Fusion programme.

The Constituency breakdown is as follows:

Belfast South	3
Mid Ulster	2
West Tyrone	1
Belfast East	3
Foyle	3
North Down	2
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	4
Belfast West	1
Upper Bann	2
Lagan Valley	1
Newry & Armagh	3

InterTradeIreland's Acumen Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many companies in each constituency currently avail of InterTradeIreland's Acumen Programme.
(AQW 3865/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently 27 Northern Ireland companies participating on the Acumen programme. The Constituency breakdown is as follows:

Belfast South	1
Belfast North	1
Mid Ulster	4
West Tyrone	2
Belfast East	3
South Antrim	2
North Antrim	1
East Londonderry	3
Foyle	2
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5
Lagan Valley	1
Upper Bann	1
Newry & Armagh	1

InterTradeIreland's All-island Innovation Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the benefits of InterTradeIreland's All-island Innovation Programme.
(AQW 3866/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the first two years of the All-Island Innovation Programme, the programme attracted 2120 participants to its events with more than 850 participants coming from the business community. Feedback from participants about speakers and content has been extremely positive.

The All-Island Innovation Programme is meeting its objectives and is helping to underpin strategic efforts to improve competitive performance through the development of more effective innovation policies and practices.

InterTradeIreland's Innova Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many companies in each constituency currently avail of InterTradeIreland's Innova Programme.
(AQW 3867/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently ten Northern Ireland companies engaged in InterTradeIreland's Innova partnerships.

The Assembly Constituency breakdown is as follows:

Belfast East	4
Belfast West	1
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2
South Antrim	2
North Down	1

Electricity Grid

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the possibilities for harnessing wave power for the electricity grid.
(AQW 3870/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland's wave resource is low and not considered commercially attractive. Of much greater potential are the offshore wind and tidal resources around our coast. The Strategic Environment Assessment of the draft Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan identified that up to 900MW of offshore wind and 300MW of tidal stream resource could be developed by 2020. The Crown Estate, as owners of the seabed, launched a Northern Ireland Offshore Leasing Round in March 2011 and it is planned to seek Expressions of Interest from developers shortly with a view to having development rights granted mid 2012.

Oil and Gas Wealth Fund

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in the event of oil and gas companies being granted permission to extract mineral wealth, whether she would consider establishing an oil and gas wealth fund to ensure that a notable share of profits made by these companies are retained within Northern Ireland and subsequently re-invested.
(AQW 3910/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Under the existing tax regime 62% of profits made by companies from oil and gas production in the United Kingdom is payable to HM Revenue & Customs. Corporation tax, ring-fenced for the petroleum-extraction operations, is set at 30%, and a supplementary tax is levied at 32%. It would be a matter for the Executive to decide whether it wished to negotiate with the Treasury for a repatriation of tax revenue arising from petroleum production in Northern Ireland.

A royalty of 7.5% on petroleum production is payable to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the former owners of the mineral rights may then claim compensation related to royalties payable.

Production of Energy from Offshore Wind

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the negotiations with the Government in the Republic of Ireland on establishing well-defined sea borders to pave the way for increasing production of energy from off-shore wind.
(AQW 3911/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The British and Irish Governments, as well as the Northern Ireland Executive, regard harnessing and exploiting offshore renewable energy as a top priority. Both the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government are moving ahead with the development of offshore renewable energy.

At EU level, in the framework of the British-Irish Council and bilaterally, discussions are continuing to facilitate and develop co-operation to this end. I am confident that DETI will be in a position to move forward on all relevant matters so as to enable the Northern Ireland leasing round to be successfully completed in the timelines announced earlier this year. It is therefore planned that Expressions of Interest will be sought shortly from developers.

Strategic Energy Framework 2010

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she reconciles increasing reliance on gas instead of renewable energy, bearing in mind the need for greater energy security as outlined in the Strategic Energy Framework 2010, when research commissioned on behalf of the European Parliament forecasts that the gap between the demand and supply of gas in the European Union is set to increase, even with the development of shale gas.
(AQW 3912/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Strategic Energy Framework 2010 outlines my Department's support for the further extension of the natural gas network in Northern Ireland where it is economic to do so, to provide consumers with additional fuel choice and, as natural gas is the least polluting fossil fuel, to benefit the environment through reduction of harmful emissions.

My Department is fully aware of the importance of security of energy supply and is supportive of private sector interest in exploring the potential for gas storage projects in the East Antrim area, both on-shore and off-shore. I am also closely following efforts to identify the potential for development of shale gas in certain areas of Northern Ireland, which if successful could also enhance our security of supply.

You will be aware that my Department has recently consulted on both gas network extension and incentivisation of the renewable heat market. I look forward to exploring how both energy sources can be developed in a complementary way which can contribute towards the development of a more secure, sustainable and diverse heat market which is not overly reliant on one particular fuel and provides greater choice for consumers and businesses.

Invest NI

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what financial commitments are in place within InvestNI for projects over the remainder of the current financial year.
(AQW 3930/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The amount of Invest NI 2011/12 programme budget spent at 31 October 2011 is £46.5million. In addition, a total of £71million of programme budget is committed for spend during the remainder of 2011/12. The £71million does not include provision for cases currently under negotiation but not yet finalised.

Purchases from Suppliers

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her Department's level of purchases from suppliers in each country in Europe, in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 3931/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not readily accessible and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Relocation of Departmental Subsets

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has undertaken a cost benefit analysis to determine potential savings from the relocation of departmental subsets to locations west of the Bann.
(AQW 3932/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The report by Professor Sir George Bain on Location of Public Sector Jobs did not identify any areas of the Department or its NDPBs for relocation.

Postalised Gas Transmission Tariffs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the increase in the postalised tariffs applicable to the gas and transmission pipelines in comparison with the last year and the forecats at that time; and (ii) whether the forecasts proved to be inaccurate, and the reasons why.
(AQW 3954/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The postalised gas transmission tariff is split into two elements:

(i) a capacity and a commodity charge which are calculated separately.

The difference between the forecast capacity and commodity charges for 2010/11 and the forecast capacity and commodity charges for 2011/12 is as outlined on the table below:

	2010/11 Forecast	**2011/12 Forecast**	**Difference**
Capacity charge (£ per Kwh/d booked)	0.31252	0.40648	30.06%
Commodity charge (£ per Kwh)	0.0005613	0.0006323	12.65 %

The capacity tariff has increased by 30.06%, largely due to a reduction in capacity bookings for Ballylumford power station, coupled with an increase in required revenues to cover operating and capital costs. Legacy capacity contracts have expired so Ballylumford power station is no longer required to book as much capacity as it used to do. The knock-on effect has been an increase in the unit cost of capacity.

The commodity tariff (for volumes) has increased by 12.65%. Although volumes are up, this increase is not enough to offset the increase in required revenues.

(ii) The table above shows an increase between the forecast 2010/11 and 2011/12 tariffs for both the capacity and commodity charges. Forecasting by its very nature will always be inaccurate as it is not possible to predict the future with absolute certainty. The aim is always however to reduce the error as far as is possible and to provide industry with the most accurate forecasts possible. It is recognised that last year's forecasts were subject to a greater level of revision for 2011/12 than is normally the case. This was due to a number of one off events whose magnitude and impact combined to produce an unusually large forecast error.

Postalised Gas Transmission Tariffs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of (i) the impact, and the potential impact, of higher than anticipated postalised tariffs applicable to gas transmission pipelines; and (ii) the effect this will have on energy prices.
(AQW 3955/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) The postalised gas transmission tariff currently accounts for between 6% and 8% of the retail price of gas for domestic customers. Where the postalised tariff accounts for some 8% of the final gas tariff, each 1% change in the level of the postalised gas transmission charge (commodity and capacity costs) will therefore result in a 0.08% change in the level of the retail tariff.

(ii) The biggest influence on retail gas prices is the wholesale cost of gas which currently accounts for approximately 55% of the overall tariff. The impact of the postalised gas transmission tariff on the overall retail tariff is relatively small and will vary according to the level of wholesale gas prices.

Postalised Gas Transmission Tariffs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that the Utility Regulator has indicated that the required revenues arising from the postalised tariff applicable to the gas transmission pipelines rose by £4.97 million in 2011/12 above the 2010/11 forecast, to detail (i) how this extra requirement has arisen; (ii) why last year's forecast was inaccurate; and (iii) how the additional £4.97 million will be spent.
(AQW 3956/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) The Utility Regulator has advised that the extra requirement of £4.97 million is due to a number of additional costs that the transmission companies (Mutual Energy and BGE(UK)) expect to incur during the coming gas year (October 2011 to September 2012).

Operating costs have increased for a number of reasons:

- A survey of the Scotland-Northern Ireland gas Pipeline (SNIP), which is carried out every two years, is due to be carried out during the 2011/12 gas year This requires a Remotely Operated Vehicle to photograph and survey the undersea sections of the pipeline. It is a costly but necessary exercise to ensure the integrity of the pipeline;
- The operational costs for use of compressors connected to the SNIP have increased. The fuel used in the compressors is gas and operational costs have risen significantly due to increases in the wholesale price of gas;
- In order to ensure compliance with EU legislation, gas companies have to make changes to their IT systems and network codes, which will result in some unavoidable additional costs; and
- Additional engineering works are also planned for the coming year.

Capital costs have also increased due to completion of the new BGE(UK) Kernan to Derryhale transmission pipeline. This pipeline is required to support the supply of natural gas to Portadown and Armagh and accommodate any further rollout of the gas network on the western side of Lough Neagh. The capital costs of the pipeline will be recovered over 25 years.

(ii) Forecasting by its very nature will always be inaccurate as it is not possible to predict the future with absolute certainty. The aim is always to reduce the error as far as is possible and to provide industry with the most accurate forecasts possible. The Utility Regulator recognises that the increase over the last year's forecasts was greater than is normally the case, and was due to a number of one off events.

(iii) The additional £4.97 million is necessary to cover the additional costs outlined at (i).

Postalised Gas Transmission Tariffs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any reduction in the volume of gas passing through the transmission pipelines, which increases the cost for gas consumers through increased postalised tariffs, was anticipated at the time of the introduction of the Single Electricity Market.
(AQW 3957/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The volume of gas passing through the natural gas transmission pipelines in Northern Ireland has reduced due to a number of factors. These include the economic downturn reducing overall demand for electricity and gas, reduced net electricity exports to the Republic of Ireland, increased imports of electricity to Northern Ireland through the Moyle interconnector from Great Britain, and an increase in alternative generation including wind.

Fracking

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the fracking method for the extraction of natural gas reserves from impermeable rock.
(AQW 3989/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is a well-established method of enhancing the natural permeability of rocks in order to improve the flow of gas or water through them. It is used extensively in shale gas operations which are now responsible for over 30% of US gas production. Fracking is not without its problems but such operations can be properly regulated, designed, managed and monitored to ensure that environmental and safety risks are minimised.

Gas Reservoirs in Shale Deposits off Blackpool

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in the light of recent finds of large gas reservoirs in shale deposits off Blackpool, whether any areas with a similar geological profile have been identified in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 3991/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Yes. Organic-rich Carboniferous shales, similar to those being drilled in Lancashire, occur in County Fermanagh although their shale gas potential has not been fully evaluated. Such rocks are also known from the Coalisland and Ballycastle coalfields where they are too shallow to be exploited for shale gas. Little is known about the distribution and nature of Carboniferous rocks which may be present in the deeper parts of the Rathlin, Larne and Lough Neagh sedimentary basins.

Fracking

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has had any communication with her counterparts in the Republic of Ireland on the issue of fracking as a means of extraction of natural gas from impermeable deposits.
(AQW 3992/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Officials in my Department have been in touch with their counterparts in the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources with regard to the licensing of shale gas exploration involving the process of hydraulic fracturing.

Friends of the Earth 'Reckless Gamblers' Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the Friends of the Earth 'Reckless Gamblers' report and the recommendations within that report; and to what extent this report has influenced the policy direction of her Department.
(AQW 4021/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The main policy instrument in the energy arena is the Strategic Energy Framework for Northern Ireland (SEF) 2010. The work to develop the SEF was taken forward over the period 2008-2010 with publication in September 2010. The Friends of the Earth report was not published until December 2010, therefore could not have been considered.

Economy: Cross-border Transport

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that the lack of a strategic overview of cross-border transport requirements might have on local businesses and Northern Ireland's ability to attract investment.
(AQO 682/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Given our location, Northern Ireland is heavily reliant on having suitable connectivity to key markets such as the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain and mainland Europe. Appropriate transport infrastructure is vital for business contacts, development of our export capability and also forms an important part of the sales message to potential inward investors.

How best to ensure that transport requirements are met within Northern Ireland is a matter for the Department of Regional Development.

Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the reasons for her decision to refuse to publish InterTradeIreland's all-Ireland agrifood report.
(AQO 681/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am not responsible for the publication of any report, including the agri-food report, produced by Inter TradeIreland.

Invest NI: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the number of funding allocations and the total funding awarded by InvestNI in the last financial year to small and medium-sized enterprises compared to foreign direct investors.
(AQO 683/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the 2010-11 financial year, Invest NI offered assistance of over £29 million to 2,820 projects by small and medium-sized enterprises. In comparison, during the same period almost £47 million was offered to 239 projects by inward investors.

Wind Turbines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she can give an assurance that the current incentive, which allows new wind turbines of up to 250kW to claim four Renewable Obligation Certificates for every 1000kWh of electricity generated, will continue until at least 2017, to give the sector security and certainty in the face of difficulties in accessing finance and with planning delays.
(AQO 684/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Last week my Department published a consultation on proposed changes to Renewables Obligation Certificate levels for the period 2013 to 2017. It is not proposed to change the current four ROCs for wind turbines up to 250kW installed capacity.

However, ROC levels may be reviewed in the future in the wider context of the Coalition Government's Electricity Market Reform initiative and any significant decrease in technology costs.

Also, it is very important that while our support for renewable electricity encourages investment, that, at all times, it represents value for money for consumers.

Industry: Automatic Assisted Area Status

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the likely impact of the proposed removal of the Automatic Assisted Area Status as outlined in the consultation document published by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills.
(AQO 685/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Given the positive impact Regional Aid has had in attracting company investment into and within Northern Ireland, it is important that we do all we can to ensure that we retain our automatic assisted area status post 2013.

In undertaking our assessment of the importance of Regional Aid, we are clear on the need to have every available policy lever necessary to rebalance and rebuild the economy. Indeed, I and my Executive colleagues have already responded robustly to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills consultation highlighting our concern with the proposal to remove Northern Ireland's automatic assisted area status.

Jobs Fund

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the reasons for the renaming of the Short Term Employment Scheme.
(AQO 686/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The decision to rename the Short Term Employment Scheme as 'The Jobs Fund' was taken in order to provide greater clarity around the exact purpose of the scheme and to address some areas of confusion with the use of 'short term'. Some people were wrongly concluding that this meant that the jobs supported were short term in nature. This is not the case. The new name - "The Jobs Fund" will more clearly communicate the primary purpose of the scheme – a ring-fenced £19m budget to support business owners to create new, sustainable jobs that will tackle our current levels of unemployment.

Broadband: South Antrim

Ms Lewis asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department is taking to ensure greater access to broadband for people living in rural areas, particularly in the South Antrim constituency area.
(AQO 687/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Over the last three years, building on its previous, significant investments, my Department has taken forward a number of initiatives that are either entirely or substantially aimed at improving broadband access for consumers located in rural areas. This includes the £51million Next Generation Broadband Project which has facilitated the roll-out of the highest level of fibre-to-the-cabinet technology in the UK, the £1.9million Northern Ireland Broadband Fund which has seen significant deployment of fixed-wireless broadband services, and the £1.2million Remote Broadband Services contract through which subsidised satellite broadband services have been made available region-wide. The South Antrim constituency in particular has already benefited and will continue to benefit from these initiatives.

Looking forward, my Department has secured £4.4million under the UK Coalition Government's Broadband Delivery UK initiative which, together with its Budget 2010 allocations, will be used to extend the delivery of higher speed services into those areas of Northern Ireland where a minimum download speed of 2 megabits per second cannot currently be attained. Work on scoping the projects that will deliver this aim is underway.

Strategic Energy Framework

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the implementation of the Strategic Energy Framework.
(AQO 688/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Strategic Energy Framework sets out our energy policy for the next ten years.

One year on from publication, I am pleased with the scale and breadth of progress made across the range of actions in the Framework. This includes progress on implementing EU Directives and other legislation, scoping of projects such as a Renewable Heat Incentive and gas extension, competition and security of supply, and emergency planning.

Business Loans

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on any proposed business loan schemes.
(AQO 689/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Growth Loan Fund is at an advanced stage and I hope to make an announcement over the coming weeks.

Advice4DebtNI

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people, on average, are contacting the Advice4DebtNI helpline each week.
(AQO 690/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Advice4debtNI dealt with an average of 31 new clients per week during the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011.

Department of the Environment

Rivers: Pollution

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the cases taken against the polluters of the SixMileWater and Ballymartin rivers.
(AQO 672/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has a robust enforcement policy for water pollution. Since 2006, NIEA has completed 14 prosecution cases for water pollution offences within the Sixmilewater and Ballymartin River catchments: resulting in the courts imposing fines on polluters, ranging from £350 to £6,000, and totalling £13,900.

In addition, NIEA has issued 21 formal warning letters and 6 legally binding enforcement notices requiring the polluter to take immediate pollution prevention action.

Two further enforcement cases are pending, in relation to a significant fish kill which occurred downstream of Ballyclare and a suspected farm pollution incident which occurred near Ballyclare. Once investigations have been completed, if appropriate, files will be prepared for consideration by the Public Prosecution Service.

Tourism: Built Heritage

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the potential to promote Northern Ireland's built heritage assets to support tourism and, in particular, the Tourist Board's signature projects.
(AQO 669/11-15)

Mr Attwood: People are sometimes surprised to learn that, already, over 18,500 known or suspected archaeological sites and monuments have been recorded in Northern Ireland, along with over 13,000 historic buildings. This is in addition to many thousands of industrial heritage sites, hundreds of historic designed landscapes, and the many Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character that have been identified across the North. These assets are fundamentally important to the whole of society, particularly in the context of our tourism economy. They are unique, authentic elements of the past that help make Northern Ireland a better place to work, live and invest in. They contribute enormously to the character of our cities, villages and countryside. Many of these are destinations for tourists already, but others have yet to realise their full heritage and economic potential.

Following the launch of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Key Signature Projects, I have been advised that officials from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency have worked closely with their

colleagues in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to develop, and strengthen, the quality of the built and archaeological heritage offering in each of those projects. All of the Key Signature Projects involve some of Northern Ireland's most important heritage assets.

In many instances, the key built heritage assets are already managed by the Department of the Environment, such as the historic Walls of Derry, Dunluce and Carrickfergus Castles, as well as many lesser-known sites such as Narrow Water Castle and Leganannay Dolmen (in the Mournes). Three of the 15 'Tier 1' attractions on the St Patrick's Trail are managed by the Department. All six buildings identified in the Walled City Built Heritage Project are listed. For Titanic and Maritime Belfast, most of the surviving infrastructure of the shipyards has been protected as historic monuments, including the slipways and docks where Titanic and its sister ships were built, while the Harland and Wolff drawing office is a Listed Building. This is in addition to the more recent, but no less iconic, yellow cranes - Samson and Goliath - that dominate Belfast's skyline.

However, there is still huge potential for the built and archaeological heritage to support tourism even more, particularly the Key Signature Projects such as St Patrick and Christian Heritage. I would welcome continued close working relationships with other bodies, particularly the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, as well as all of the departments in this Assembly which also have a role to play in delivering these projects.

Beaches

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the guidance he is providing to Councils on the cleansing of beaches.
(AQO 663/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department's current guidance to councils on the cleansing of beaches is set out in the statutory Code of Practice on Litter that issued under the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994. The guidance states that "District councils should identify those beaches in their ownership or control which might reasonably be described as 'amenity beaches'. Any assessment should take into account the level of use of the beach for recreational purposes. As a minimum standard, all beaches identified by the district council as amenity beaches should be generally clear of all types of litter between 1 May and 30 September inclusive. This applies to items or material originating from discharges directly to the marine environment as well as litter left by beach users. The same standards should apply to inland beaches where substantial numbers of bathers or other beach users may congregate".

The Department has recently consulted on a revised draft Code of Practice to take account of the stronger new powers being given to councils to tackle litter under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act.

The revised draft Code of Practice, which will be laid before the Assembly, is currently being finalised taking account of the responses to the consultation exercise. It will enhance the guidance to councils on the cleansing of beaches, both within and outside of the traditional bathing season of 1 May to 30 September to take account of changing holiday and climatic patterns, and beach usage.

Single Use Carrier Bags

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment for an overview of the responses to the consultation on the proposals to introduce a charge on single use carrier bags.
(AQO 666/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department's consultation on proposals for a carrier bag levy commenced on 20 July 2011 and closed on 12 October 2011. Departmental officials worked closely with the relevant representative bodies to ensure that the consultation paper was widely circulated.

The consultation paper invited comments on a range of issues related to the Department's policy proposals, including the type of bags to be covered by the new arrangements, the amount of the charge and arrangements for administration, collection and enforcement. The outcome of the consultation will assist in determining a detailed framework for the introduction of the levy.

The Department received 63 responses to the consultation; officials are currently analysing the comments received, and will produce a detailed synopsis. At this stage I can confirm that, as one would expect, the majority of responses came from the retail sector. Other responses included those from local government, bag and packaging manufacturers, environmental bodies, consumer groups and individuals.

I will publish the synopsis on the Department's website as soon as possible and will, of course, keep the Executive and the Environment Committee informed of key policy developments.

Better Regulation

Mr Newton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the better regulation agenda and how it is benefiting businesses.
(AQO 667/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department places great importance on Better Regulation, recognising that more streamlined services deliver a greater protection for our environment and reduce the burden on responsible businesses. Our progress in delivering our Better Regulation Programme has been warmly received by industry partners, particularly the members of our Better Regulation Board.

Businesses are benefiting already by:

- free, straightforward advice is available for their sector through NetRegs;
- applying and paying online for environmental permits;
- applying protocols which allow companies to make use of materials rather than waste them;
- the greater certainty our clear 3 year Charging Policy gives businesses on fees;
- reducing the inspection footfall on farms through a joined up approach with DARD;
- environmental workshops which have been delivered in partnership with industry and Business in the Community's ARENA Network.
- a written agreement between the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Construction Industry Group on archaeological matters which is helping to ensure that we can have development AND secure our heritage.

That is why, in addition to the practical better regulation initiatives already under way within the NIEA, the Department is the first to publish proposals for fundamental regulatory reform through the Environmental Better Regulation White Paper. The response has been very positive and I will be developing specific policy and legislation to deliver simpler, clearer, more effective and flexible environmental legislation. We want our economy and our environment to prosper.

Local Government: Members of the Legislative Assembly

Mr Cree asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will introduce legislation to exclude Members of the Legislative Assembly from holding elected offices in local government.
(AQO 668/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am considering legislation in this regard as part of the RPA.

I have, also, recently launched a consultation which seeks views on whether certain allowances which are payable to councillors should be reduced by two-thirds for councillors who are also MPs, MLAs or members of the House of Lords.

This consultation will close on 16 December 2011.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Farm Inspections

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment how many farm inspections have been carried out by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency since 15 October 2011.
(AQO 670/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) carried out 33 scheduled Cross Compliance farm inspections between the 16 October and the 26 October 2011.

In addition, 7 reactive farm inspections were carried out in response to public complaint. Only 1 of these was directly related to slurry spreading.

EU Water Framework Directive

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.
(AQO 671/11-15)

Mr Attwood: River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) were published in December 2009 to meet one of the key requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

The Plans, which cover all of NI, identify where the water environment needs to be protected or improved, the timeframe to make these improvements and how that can be achieved.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has the lead responsibility for coordination of the implementation of the Directive. The Agency continues to work with officials in DARD, DCAL and DRD and their agencies to take forward the implementation of the actions set out in the Plans. A progress report is currently being prepared and will be reported to the European Commission by December 2012, as required under the Directive.

The implementation of the RMBPs is being taken forward through the development and implementation of 26 Local Management Area (LMA) action plans over a three year rolling programme from 2010/11 to 2012/13.

The first 9 of the 26 local action plans were produced in March 2011 and these are currently being implemented. The next set of nine are due to be completed by March 2012. Implementation actions include additional targeted biological monitoring, awareness raising, targeted river walks to identify individual pollution hotspots and inspections of premises with the potential to cause water pollution.

In addition NIEA has continued with its WFD monitoring and assessment programme to classify the status of rivers, lakes and marine waters across Northern Ireland. The results of this monitoring are published annually in the NI Environmental Statistics Report.

Litter

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to increasing the levels of fines imposed on people convicted of littering offences.
(AQO 673/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I do not have any plans to increase the maximum level of fine, currently £2,500, for people convicted of littering offences in a court of summary jurisdiction.

Through the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which comes into operation next April, I have strengthened the powers available to councils to address the problem of litter. This includes giving Councils the opportunity to set the level of fixed penalty fine locally, up to a maximum of £110 depending on the offence.

Planning: Wind Farms

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for wind farms have been considered by District Planning Offices in each of the last three years and, of these, how many have been approved.
(AQO 674/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Area Planning Offices have general responsibility for planning matters within the Council districts. However planning applications for wind farms are processed through the Renewable Energy Team based at Millennium House in Belfast.

Within the last three years a total of 24 wind farm applications have been considered and, of these, 22 have been approved.

These break down by year in the following way. In 2009, 7 applications were considered and 6 were approved. In 2010, 10 applications were considered and all 10 were approved. In 2011 to date, 7 applications have been considered and 6 of these have been approved.

Local Government: Review of Public Administration

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment what impact the implementation of the Review of Public Administration will have on staff employed by Councils.
(AQO 675/11-15)

Mr Attwood: So far as the local government part of RPA reform is concerned the Executive decision to reduce the number of councils, will when finalised and implemented, eventually impact on staff employed by the 26 councils that exist currently.

Those impacts will be carefully thought through and negotiated with their representative organisations and employing authorities through the Local Government Reform Joint Forum which was set us for just this purpose.

The impacts will be underpinned by the commitment to act in the best interests of the affected staff enshrined in the Executive Guiding Principles for RPA overall.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Energy Efficiency and the Low Carbon Homes Schemes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how much savings were made from the closure of the Energy Efficiency and the Low Carbon Homes Schemes; and (ii) whether this funding will be transferred to the Green New Deal as originally intended.
(AQW 3590/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): In respect of the Energy Efficiency Homes scheme I would refer the member to my answer to AQW/1623/11-15.

There have been no savings to date for the low carbon home scheme given that slightly more has been paid out in 2010/11 in relief than last year. This is to be expected given that I decided to allow a year's grace for houses in the process of being built to the required high standards, in response to calls from the construction industry.

For both schemes savings, including the eventual administrative savings, will only be allocated to a Green New Deal (GND) solution following a positive assessment of a business case by DSD and DFP. In conjunction with the Green New Deal Coalition, DSD are preparing a business case to include the GND delivery proposal as part of a wider options appraisal.

Townland Addresses

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 2984/11-15, whether a feasibility study was carried out on the possibility of Fermanagh District Council introducing the Pointer System in conjunction with using townland addresses, so that those living in Co. Fermanagh could continue to use their townland as their principal address.
(AQW 3876/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No feasibility study has been carried out by my Department on the possibility of Fermanagh District Council introducing the Pointer System in conjunction with using townland addresses.

The Pointer system is available to all Government Departments and local authorities, including Fermanagh District Council, through the Northern Ireland Mapping Agreement.

Whilst all Departments and Councils have access to the Pointer system it is not the role of my Department to carry out individual feasibility studies as to how Pointer is deployed within those organisations. However, Land & Property Services, which has responsibility for the Pointer system, would be pleased to assist the Council should it wish to carry out such a study.

EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline their Department's plans to maximise the benefits from the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy.
(AQW 3950/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department is actively engaging with the relevant UK authorities to secure the best allocation of funding to Northern Ireland for the 2014-20 period.

Once the EU Budget and Regulations for that period are agreed, DFP will be working closely with other departments and stakeholders to identify a range of activities for possible inclusion in funding programmes, that will meet both the requirements of the Cohesion Policy regulations and the priorities agreed by the Executive. A range of options will be developed for Executive consideration in due course.

Cohesion Policy from 2014 will be closely focussed on the objectives and targets of Europe 2020 which is the EU's growth strategy for the current decade, which aims to make the EU a smarter, more sustainable and inclusive economy, delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. NI will use available funds in programmes to enhance our modern competitive base and to create sustainable employment for all sections of society.

Securing a fifth round of Cross Border Cooperation funding under the Cooperation Objective remains a particular priority of the Northern Ireland Executive. Additionally, Northern Ireland Ministers have strongly advised the UK Government of the Executive's desire for a further PEACE Programme, and the draft EU Structural Fund Regulations for 2014-2020 make provision for peace-building actions funded under the Cooperation objective.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

At Risk Register

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what checks are carried out to monitor the welfare of a child on the At Risk Register.
(AQW 2592/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The criteria used to assess whether a child should be placed on the At Risk Register are set out in the Department's guidance, Co-operating to Safeguard Children (2003) and in the Regional Child Protection Committee's Policy and Procedures Guidance. Social Workers are required to follow this guidance and will exercise their professional judgment when responding to the particular circumstances of individual children and their families. Following a comprehensive assessment of risk, which concludes that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, the child's name should be included on the Child Protection Register. When a child's name is included on the Child Protection Register, a Child Protection Plan is put in place

for the child which, among other things, sets out how identified risks will be managed and the welfare needs of the child met.

Public Consultation on a UK Plan for Rare Diseases

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when his Department intends to launch a public consultation on a UK plan for rare diseases.
(AQW 3292/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department will be launching a public consultation on the UK Plan for Rare Diseases in line with the timetable set by the Department of Health, London which is leading on development of the Plan. This is now likely to begin in November 2011.

Mental Health Act: Legislation

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) when new legislation will be introduced as a result of the review of the Mental Health Act; (ii) what steps are being taken to ensure that any new legislation is introduced as soon as possible; and (iii) why has it taken so long to introduce the legislation.
(AQW 3856/11-15)

Mr Poots: I recognise that it has taken some time to develop this legislation but bringing mental capacity and mental health provisions into a single Bill is a complex project that has not been attempted in any other jurisdiction. There is, therefore, no legislative model that can be usefully used. Provided outstanding policy and drafting issues are resolved, it is anticipated that the Mental Capacity (Health, Welfare and Finance) Bill could be introduced to the Assembly in Autumn 2012. My officials have been engaged in a structured and inclusive policy development process and are currently working closely with the Office of the Legislative Counsel to ensure timely progression. My Department's original intention had been to deliver legislative reform in the 2007-11 Assembly mandate (with the enactment of separate mental capacity and mental health legislation). However, following a public consultation in 2009, it became clear that there was strong support from key stakeholders for a single Bill approach. Stakeholders recognised that a single Bill would take longer to deliver but maintained that it was an important opportunity for the Department to get its legislative approach right.

Care Packages for Children in the Formal Care System

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to his Department of providing care packages for children in the formal care system (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by (a) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (b) constituency, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 3948/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) Costs in total

	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	Total £m
Total	69,313,201	76,020,084	75,867,149	221,200,434

(ii) Costs broken down by Trust

Board/Trust	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	Total £m
HSCB	5,647,498	5,731,892	5,978,438	17,357,828
Belfast	14,413,415	15,902,584	15,561,130	45,877,129

Board/Trust	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	Total £m
Northern	13,855,150	14,737,586	14,543,187	43,135,923
Southern	13,599,291	14,947,262	15,810,716	44,357,269
Western Trust**	10,857,147	11,435,502	11,082,654	33,375,303
South Eastern	10,940,700	13,265,258	12,891,024	37,096,982
Total	**69,313,201**	**76,020,084**	**75,867,149**	**221,200,434**

** Does not include costs associated with payments to voluntary bodies that receive funding for children in formal care settings and costs of children looked after in their own home where the child has a social worker, LAC reviews and support services

(b) Costs by constituency could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Health and Social Care Trust Staff

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of hours in each Health and Social Care Trust area where staff have 'acted-up' (a) with; and (b) without a commensurate increase in remuneration in the 2010/11 financial year.
(AQW 3961/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Staffing Arrangements for the South West Acute Hospital

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the adequacy of staffing arrangements for the South West Acute Hospital.
(AQW 3962/11-15)

Mr Poots: The adequacy of staffing arrangements for the South West Acute Hospital is a matter primarily for the Western Health and Social Care Trust to address. The Trust will be responsible for securing the complement of appropriately trained and specialist hospital staff required to provide safe, effective and sustainable services.

The Trust has advised that it has reviewed staffing arrangements and has developed workforce plans to ensure that adequate staffing levels are in place for the new South West acute hospital for its opening in June 2012.

Fire and Rescue Service Budget

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can offer an assurance that, despite significant cuts to the Fire & Rescue Services budget, there will be no reduction in the number of (i) fire engines in use by retained fire stations; (ii) retained fire stations; and (iii) retained firefighters.
(AQW 4016/11-15)

Mr Poots: The effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue service provision are reviewed regularly by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. It issued a draft Integrated Risk Management Plan for public consultation on 26 October setting out proposals for service delivery for the period 2012 – 2015.

Generic Drugs

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2969/11-15, (i) for an estimate of the savings that could be made to the annual drugs budget if

generic prescribing levels were raised from 62 per cent to 70 per cent; and (ii) to detail the areas in which community pharmacies would play an integral role in delivering savings in the drugs budget.
(AQW 4017/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) It is generic dispensing rates, as opposed to generic prescribing rates which generate savings to the annual drugs budget. I have been advised by the Health and Social Care Board that estimated savings on the annual drugs budget of approximately £3million could be made if the generic dispensing rate in Northern Ireland was raised to the maximum level possible by dispensing generic versions of those medicines that are currently prescribed by a brand name. However, I would caution that it is difficult to predict actual savings within what is a volatile marketplace.

(ii) Until the outcome of the Judicial Review, brought by Community Pharmacy NI against the Department and the Board, is known it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the possible contractual role that community pharmacies could play in delivering savings to the drug budget.

Child Order Statistics

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Child Order Statistics, how many biological fathers have abused their children in each of the last four years.
(AQW 4076/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Children Order Statistics to which you refer relates only to children presenting to Health and Social Care Trusts, and not to alleged abusers of children. For this reason, the figures you have requested are not detailed in any of the Children Order Statistical bulletins published annually by my Department.

Child Order Statistics

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Child Order Statistics, how many biological mothers have abused their children in each of the last four years.
(AQW 4077/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Children Order Statistics to which you refer relates only to children presenting to Health and Social Care Trusts, and not to alleged abusers of children. For this reason, the figures you have requested are not detailed in any of the Children Order Statistical bulletins published annually by my Department.

Podiatry Care

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the criteria used to determine whether a patient with sight loss can be referred for routine podiatry care, free of charge under the Health Service.
(AQW 4124/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is no specific access criterion which specifies that a person with sight loss should be referred for routine podiatry care. Referral to Podiatry is made on the basis that there is an underlying foot pathology, which would benefit from Podiatric assessment, advice and possible intervention. There is no cost to the patient for podiatry treatment.

Dementia Strategy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the introduction of a dementia strategy.
(AQO 705/11-15)

Mr Poots: As you will be aware I made a statement to the Assembly earlier today on the publication of a regional strategy for improving dementia services in Northern Ireland. Dementia care is an important issue facing us all, and the expected increases in numbers of people with dementia will bring further pressures on our health and social care services. The aim of the Strategy is to provide a framework for the HSC Commissioners in the design of improved dementia services.

Alcohol Abuse

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans for tackling alcohol abuse.
(AQO 702/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department leads on the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD), which is a cross-sectoral strategy to reduce the harm related to substance misuse in Northern Ireland.

Approximately £8 million is allocated to its implementation each year, and additional funding is provided through the mental health budget for the provision of treatment and support services. The NSD seeks to direct action across five pillars: prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research.

It was agreed last year that the NSD would be refreshed, updated and extended for a further five years. The revised NSD issued for public consultation in March 2011. Responses have been analysed and are supportive of the approach being taken. The strategy is now being finalised in light of the consultation and it is anticipated that it will be published before the end of this year.

I am particularly concerned about how some alcohol is priced, promoted and marketed, and the NSD Phase 2 raises these issues. Therefore, my Department has been working closely with the Department for Social Development who led a joint consultation on the principle of introducing minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland. Responses to the consultation are now being analysed with a view to the two Departments producing an options paper on the way forward for consideration by both the Social Development Minister and I.

Business Services Organisation

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many pharmacies have expressed an interest to the Business Services Organisation to reduce working hours to prevent closure.
(AQW 4177/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSC Board has advised that, to date, they have received a total of ten applications from community pharmacists requesting changes to their opening hours. Seven of these applications are to reduce opening hours and the remainder are requests to extend contracted opening hours. The requests received to reduce hours all relate to Saturday opening. There is no indication as to the reason for these requests.

Cedar Lodge School, Belfast: Occupational Therapist

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he intends to take, in conjunction with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, to provide a full-time occupational therapist at Cedar Lodge School, Belfast.
(AQO 698/11-15)

Mr Poots: Occupational Therapy (OT) is currently provided at the school by a senior therapist one day per week. The therapist works mainly in an advisory/consultation and training role with teachers in order to maximise the effectiveness of the programmes provided for children, especially in the early years and early stages of development. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has no plans to reduce this current level of service, but, in the current very challenging financial climate, the Trust is unable to increase the level of OT provision at Cedar Lodge.

Children can of course access core paediatric OT services in the community. However, the Public Health Agency has also undertaken to review how Allied Health Professionals, including occupational therapists, support children with special needs in special schools and mainstream education across NI. The focus of this Review will be on making best use of this skilled resource and improving services for as many children as possible.

NHS: Trade Unions

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the estimated annual cost to his Department and the wider Health Service resulting from the involvement of Health and Social Care staff in trade union activities.
(AQO 699/11-15)

Mr Poots: Employers in Northern Ireland are bound by legislation to make provisions for Trade Union activity in the workplace.

The estimated annual cost, calculated on a basic salary basis, to my Department and the wider Health Service resulting from the involvement of Health and Social Care staff in trade union activities for 2010/11 was just over £1.6m.

Hospitals: Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to ensure that people go to Accident and Emergency Departments when it is appropriate and use Out-of-Hours GP services or pharmacies if these will meet their needs in the first instance.
(AQO 700/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is essential that we ensure the usage of our health and social care services is appropriate – Accident and Emergency Departments should be dealing with just that, accidents and emergencies.

Primary and community care services have an important role in ensuring that only those who need to do so attend an Accident and Emergency Department. This includes having a focus on improving public health and prevention, ensuring appropriate access to services, and the effective management of chronic conditions.

There are currently initiatives underway to encourage people to use Out-of-Hours GP services or pharmacies rather than going to Accident and Emergency Departments. These services can play a vital role in providing the public with access to primary care services and I would encourage the public to make full use of them in order to reduce the pressure on vital hospital services.

In June, I initiated the Review of Health and Social Care Services to examine the future provision of health services, including hospital and primary health and social care services. The Review is examining how we help to ensure patients are treated in the right place, at the right time, by the right people. The Review is due to report its conclusions to me by the end of November.

DHSSPS: Joined-up Working

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to promote joined-up working across Government.
(AQO 701/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health is not just an issue for my Department; it belongs to all the Executive Departments and knows no borders. I have met with a number of my Ministerial colleagues specifically to promote joined-up working, identify issues and tackle any areas of difficulty. I have also met with colleagues in Edinburgh, Cardiff, London and Dublin. There are many areas where we can co-operate to maximise efficiency and impact on service delivery.

Joined-up working is the key to success on many vital issues:- ill-health prevention, the protection of children, suicide prevention, early intervention initiatives such as the family nurse partnerships, tackling

alcohol abuse, development of an autism strategy and capital programmes such as Desertcreat. The establishment of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership by the Health and Social Care Board is an excellent example of joined-up working across statutory agencies which I am confident will deliver a real improvement in outcomes for our children.

Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the model of integrated planning and commissioning of children's services through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.
(AQO 703/11-15)

Mr Poots: I welcome the establishment of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the commitment to the partnership of the leaders of organisations, which have within their individual gift the potential of achieving positive outcomes for children across Northern Ireland in key areas of their lives. In my view, the Partnership, through its integrated approach to planning and capacity to jointly commission children's services, has the very real potential of making a difference in the lives of children and Northern Ireland.

The Partnership is young, it has met only twice, but it has already made the links with government through its adoption of the 6 outcomes of the Executive's 10-year Strategy for Children and Young People. I am keen to see the links established in the other direction, that is, the Executive linking with the Partnership. This would enable us to draw on the evidence about what works for children, gathered through the Partnership's five Outcomes Groups, for the purpose of informing policy development and assessing the extent to which our policy aims are being met. The focus of the Partnership on early intervention is particularly welcomed.

Prescription Drugs

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's involvement in combating the illegal trade in prescription drugs.
(AQO 704/11-15)

Mr Poots: This Department, through its Medicines Regulatory Group (MRG), has a statutory obligation to ensure compliance with national and international legislative requirements regarding the sale of medicines.

However, there is a recognised increase in unlawful trading in medicines - particularly on the internet. This is a global issue and my Department is working very closely with other regulatory agencies including the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, the United Kingdom Border Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland to tackle this problem.

We have been proactive in that:

(a) We continue to undertake local, national and international collaborative enforcement work to seize unauthorised drugs and we recently destroyed some 500,000 tablets and injections seized by the Medicines Regulatory Group; and

(b) We have also acted to raise public awareness of the dangers of purchasing medicines from unregulated sources recommending that patients obtain their medicines from a legitimate source.

Notably, we also participate in international regulatory activities including Operation Pangea IV which resulted in more than 12,000 illegal websites being closed down in the UK and over one million doses of unlicensed medicinal products being destroyed including antibiotics, steroids, anti depressants and anti cancer medicines to the value of an estimated £2 million.

Department of Justice

Prison Review Team

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what has been the cost, to date, of the Prison Review Team; and what is the projected final cost.
(AQW 3813/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The cost to date for the work of the Prison Review Team, including team member's remuneration is £430,337.60. The final projected outturn figure will be circa £460,000 once all outstanding invoices have been paid.

Children Who Commit a Criminal Offence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2676/11-15, what action his Department is taking to ensure that there is a clamp down on parents or guardians who use or encourage children in the committing of crimes.
(AQW 3819/11-15)

Mr Ford: Within the justice system, the identification and prosecution of parents or guardians who use or encourage children in the committing of crimes is a matter for the independent investigatory and prosecuting authorities. There will also be a role for social services in challenging parents or guardians who are found to have encouraged their child in the commission of an offence.

There is, however, no evidence to suggest that this practice is at all commonplace. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority of parents adopt a responsible attitude to their children's behaviour and many are in need of support rather than punishment.

Separated Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether separated prisoners who have not signed the required compact can be held accountable to the prison authorities for breaching rules, even if the Prison Governor has signed the compact on their behalf.
(AQW 3879/11-15)

Mr Ford: All prisoners, including separated prisoners, can be held to account for breaching prison rules.

Access to Justice Review

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what discussions are planned with the Family Bar Association regarding the Access to Justice Review.
(AQW 3897/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Access to Justice Review Report was published for public consultation on 13 September and responses invited by 13 December. In addition my Department has written to more than 450 individuals and organisations seeking their views on the report. This included the Bar Council which represents all practising barristers in Northern Ireland and the Family Bar Association. My Department has not received a request for discussions about the report from the Family Bar Association or the Bar Council.

Legal Aid System

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to reforming the Legal Aid system to rebalance fees between junior and senior barristers.
(AQW 3919/11-15)

Mr Ford:

Criminal Legal Aid

In making rules to set fees for junior and senior barristers for work in the Magistrates' and Crown Courts, the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 places a duty on me to have regard, among the matters which are relevant, to:

(a) the time and skill involved in the work to which the rules relate;

(b) the number and general level of competence of persons undertaking that work;

(c) the cost to public funds of any provision made by the rules; and

(d) the need to secure value for money.

In discharging this requirement and setting fees for junior and senior barristers, I must also take account of historical practice in relation to the linkage of fees between barristers, whereby a junior barrister supporting a senior barrister in a case would expect their fee to be two-thirds of the senior's fees. Generally, junior barristers in Northern Ireland are paid fees that are proportionately closer to those of senior barristers than would be the case with fees paid in England & Wales.

No consideration is being given currently to reforming criminal legal aid to rebalance fees between junior and senior barristers for work in the Magistrates' and Crown Courts.

The fees of junior and senior barristers, as they relate to work in the Court of Appeal, are subject to taxation. Consideration of any rebalancing of fees would be a matter for the Taxing Master.

Civil Legal Aid

In civil proceedings junior barristers' fees are generally two-thirds of the fees of senior barristers (where a senior barrister has been engaged).

The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has been reviewing the remuneration for both junior and senior barristers across all court tiers and jurisdictions, including the balance of fees between junior and senior barristers.

This work also includes a review of the criteria for engagement of barristers in civil proceedings and will take into consideration both research which the Commission has undertaken and the recommendations of the Access to Justice Review. The Commission intends to consult shortly on proposals for remuneration.

The fees in cases where both junior and senior barristers are engaged are generally within the High Court jurisdiction and are subject to taxation where the fees are determined by the Taxing Master. The Commission is reviewing the fees and hourly rates and the proportion of fees between junior and senior barristers.

The Commission is also reviewing the levels of remuneration in the Family Care Centre.

These proposals will lead to a rebalancing of all legal fees and remuneration including between junior and senior barristers (where a senior barrister is engaged) to bring more control and predictability to the legal aid budget and to ensure that an appropriate level of representation is provided to assisted parties.

Legal Aid System

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to reforming the Legal Aid system to provide greater access and support to victims of domestic violence.
(AQW 3920/11-15)

Mr Ford: As part of its programme to reform civil legal aid, the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission will consider the introduction of a waiver on the financial eligibility limits for those suffering from domestic violence.

In advance of these reforms on 30 December 2010, I announced an immediate change to legal aid in order to provide increased protection for victims of domestic violence.

The changes I announced removed the upper income and capital limits for people applying for legal aid for non-molestation orders in the Magistrates' Court meaning that those who would previously not have been entitled to funding because of their financial status could now access legal aid to obtain these orders.

Since the introduction of the waiver on 22 December 2010, the scheme has benefited 101 applicants, none of whom would have qualified for legal aid before the introduction of the waiver.

A review of the scheme will be completed in December 2011.

Prisoners on Remand

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many prisoners are currently on remand in each prison facility, including the Juvenile Justice Centre and Hydebank Young Offenders Centre; and how many of these are foreign nationals.
(AQW 3935/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of prisoners, including foreign nationals, currently on remand in each prison facility is set out in table A below:-

TABLE A

Establishment	Total number of Prisoners currently on remand.	Number of Foreign Nationals on remand.
Maghaberry	541	86
Magilligan	0	0
Hydebank Wood	120	8
Juvenile Justice Centre	13	0

These figures are correct as at 31 October 2011.

Glorification of Terrorism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether there is a provision within legislation to lay charges in relation to the glorification of terrorism.
(AQW 3936/11-15)

Mr Ford: Section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2006 makes it an offence to encourage terrorism, which includes a statement which glorifies the commission or preparation of an act of terrorism.

The maximum penalty on indictment for an offence under section 1 is seven years imprisonment, an unlimited fine or both. A summary conviction can attract imprisonment for up to six months, a fine of up to £5000 or both.

Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases have been judicially reviewed, after being made subject to the Justice and Security (NI) Act 2007; and of these, how many (i) are pending; (ii) have been successful; and (iii) have been unsuccessful.
(AQW 3937/11-15)

Mr Ford: There has been one case where the decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions to issue a Certificate under Section 1 of the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 has been judicially reviewed.

The judgment in this case was delivered on 30 June 2010 and the application for judicial review was dismissed. On 21 October 2011 leave to appeal this decision to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom was refused.

Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of whether some prisoners are in custody, as sentenced or remand, to protect public safety and that these prisoners cannot be placed in the category of solely seeking to rehabilitate.
(AQW 3939/11-15)

Mr Ford: In detaining someone in custody the court has decided that they are not suitable for bail, community sentence or other disposal. However, it is recognised that the time spent by offenders in prison offers a significant opportunity to work towards their rehabilitation and reintegration into society by working with them to tackle the causes of their offending, and to help reduce their risk of reoffending. This rehabilitative approach aims to improve public protection by helping offenders to desist from crime.

In addition, the new public protection sentences introduced under the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 provide for an increased number of prisoners to be discharged under licence, and to be subject to compulsory supervision in the community. The Order also provides for judges to recommend the inclusion of specific licence conditions when sentencing an offender. The purpose of the licence is not just to rehabilitate the offender, but also to protect the public and prevent re-offending and this is done by supporting him/her during their licence period. It can be argued that to achieve success, there has to be some level of participation by the offender, but every possible effort is made to provide support in what can often be difficult and complex circumstances for offenders in the community.

Police Ombudsman

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, given the legal status of the Police Ombudsman as a 'corporation sole' and the number of statutory powers which are personal to the office holder, what would be the practical consequences of the office being vacant; and what functions could not be performed during a vacancy.
(AQW 3953/11-15)

Mr Ford: The office of the Ombudsman is a corporation sole. Paragraph 9 of Schedule 3 to the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 provides that any functions of the Ombudsman may be performed by any officer of the Ombudsman authorised for the purpose by the Ombudsman. The Department considers that officers of the Ombudsman so authorised may perform functions of the Ombudsman during a vacancy.

Secretary of State for Justice: Proposals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the proposals by the Secretary of State for Justice to have (i) mandatory life sentences for a second serious sexual or violent crime; and (ii) mandatory custodial sentences for 16 or 17 year olds threatening with a knife.
(AQW 3974/11-15)

Mr Ford: I understand that the proposal to increase the scope of mandatory life sentences is part of a wider piece of work to address the significant difficulties created by operation of the Indeterminate Public Protection (IPP) sentence in England and Wales.

Through the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, similar Indeterminate Custodial Sentences (ICSs) are available to judges in Northern Ireland in order to protect the public. However, our framework operates in a different way and we have not experienced the same problems with this type of sentence in our justice system.

The proposed mandatory penalty for using a knife to threaten others is, I understand, in response to a Westminster Report into gang and youth violence following this summer's riots in England and Wales.

The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 only recently completed a revised knife crime sentencing package for Northern Ireland, doubling penalties for a wide range of offences involving knives.

Although I will keep these areas under review, at this stage I have no plans to introduce similar proposals for Northern Ireland.

Robert Black

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what form of transport was used to transport Robert Black from prison in England to Northern Ireland for trial; (ii) whether this transport was specially chartered; and (iii) to detail the total costs involved in transporting Mr Black for all his court appearances in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 3975/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Mr Black was transported by aeroplane from Leeds to Belfast International Airport.

(ii) The plane was chartered at a cost of £5,675 including VAT and was paid for by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

(iii) Mr Black was transported from Maghaberry Prison to attend for trial in Craigavon Courthouse on three occasions and Armagh Courthouse on 22 occasions at a total cost of £7,012.28.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether a language barrier is grounds for granting legal aid to an applicant; and how many applicants were granted legal aid for this reason in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 4006/11-15)

Mr Ford: While interpretation assistance may be funded through legal aid to assist a defendant in preparing his defence, this is not normally the determining factor in the decision whether or not to grant legal aid and accordingly the information requested is not collected. If a person before the courts requires an interpreter one will be provided by the court. This service is funded directly by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

Separated Republican Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether negotiations are on-going with the separated Republican prisoners who are refusing to conform to prison regulations; and to what extent the Prisoner Ombudsman is involved.
(AQW 4007/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no ongoing negotiations with separated republican prisoners who are refusing to conform to prison regulations. They have been encouraged to take part in a 'prisoner forum' where they can discuss their concerns with prison management. Prisoners have declined the opportunity to take part. The Prisoner Ombudsman continues to investigate complaints by prisoners and make recommendations arising from those investigations. I have not asked the Ombudsman to become involved in negotiations. I am satisfied that sufficient and appropriate arrangements for engagement with prisoners in Maghaberry Prison are already in place.

Uninsured Drivers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline any plans to give additional powers to the PSNI for dealing with uninsured drivers.
(AQO 713/11-15)

Mr Ford: A range of powers already exist to deal with vehicles being driven without insurance. Since 2007, the police have had powers to seize vehicles being driven without insurance. I understand that this power is extensively used, with around 200 vehicles per month being seized.

The maximum penalty for driving without insurance has also been increased in 2008 to a fine of up to £5000, six months imprisonment, or both. Whilst I have no immediate plans to provide any additional powers or penalties, if the police were to approach me with such a request I would, of course, consider it.

Prisoners: Annual Cost

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice what is the average annual cost of keeping an inmate in prison.
(AQO 707/11-15)

Mr Ford: As published in the Northern Ireland Prison Service's Annual Report and Accounts, the average cost per prisoner place in 2010/11 was £73,762. This figure was significantly lower than the target of £76,500.

The average cost of keeping a prisoner in custody has reduced by £4,069 from 2009/10, to £ 73,762 in 2010/11, and it is anticipated that this will be further reduced to approximately £60,000 when the current reform process is complete. This is subject to the successful delivery of the voluntary exit scheme announced today, and construction of new accommodation as part of the Estates Strategy.

Security: Dissident Republicans

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the current level of dissident Republican activity and the threat it poses to members of the security forces and the general public.
(AQO 715/11-15)

Mr Ford: The threat from dissident Republicans remains SEVERE. To date this year they have been responsible for 25 attacks; compared to 40 in 2010 as a whole. It is clear that their principal target is police officers, as illustrated by the pipe bomb attack on the home of a retired police officer in Lawrencetown on 20 October. But they have also conducted recent attacks on commercial premises and on the Derry/Londonderry City of Culture office. They have demonstrated disregard for those serving the community and for public safety. Those responsible have no regard for the harm they cause whether to people, or business or, indeed, our image abroad.

The PSNI and An Garda Síochána are continuing to work hard to tackle the threat, and I would like to acknowledge their continued endeavours and co-operation in frustrating the efforts of terrorists. There have been significant successes both sides of the border in recent months.

The way forward, of course, depends not simply on police to provide the answer. This is an issue for the Executive, Assembly and community. The message is clear, as demonstrated recently when this Assembly stood united against terrorism and through the united response to the attack on the City of Culture office. Those responsible appear to be deaf to the will of the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland. We need to continue to demonstrate to all terrorists that they have nothing to offer and that there are democratic means for engagement.

Sex Offender Notification and Violent Offender Orders

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the public consultation on Sex Offender Notification and Violent Offender Orders.
(AQO 717/11-15)

Mr Ford: A summary of responses was published on the Department's website on 1 November. The overall message was one of support for the proposed changes to the law. This has allowed for policy proposals to be further developed. A paper detailing the proposed legislative changes will be presented to the Justice Committee at its meeting on 17 November.

Security: Community Buildings

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Justice what actions he and his Department have taken to assist the police in providing better security around buildings such as Orange halls, churches and GAA facilities.
(AQO 718/11-15)

Mr Ford: As you are aware from my letter of 17 October, I met recently with senior Police Officers to discuss attacks on symbolic buildings. In an effort to bring a greater focus to their work on this issue the PSNI have developed a strategy based on engagement, patrolling and investigation. There is no doubt that this has contributed to a reduction in the number of attacks – statistics show a 30% decrease in the number of attacks for 2010/11 as compared to 2009/10.

This, however, is not a problem that the police can solve alone. Those responsible for these buildings must also take reasonable steps to ensure they are secure and can call on Crime Prevention Officers to offer advice.

In addition local communities, councils and central Government all have a responsibility to build mutual respect and tolerance. For my part, I will continue to encourage those with influence to work together to address the underlying issues and build a shared future for all.

Parole Commissioners

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what steps are being taken to reform how the Parole Commissioners exercise their functions to ensure public confidence.
(AQO 719/11-15)

Mr Ford: The functions of the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland are set out in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. As the Parole Commissioners are statutorily independent of Government, it is a matter for them how they express these functions.

The Department is in discussion with the Parole Commissioners and the relevant criminal justice agencies regarding updating the Parole Commissioners Rules (Northern Ireland) 2009. Possible changes to Commissioners' procedures under consideration include the release of information about oral hearings, and a review of the right of certain offenders to an automatic oral hearing.

Any proposed revision of the Rules will be brought forward through the appropriate Assembly procedures including consultation with the Justice Committee.

RUC Museum

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the progress made on the new RUC Museum planned for PSNI Headquarters.
(AQO 720/11-15)

Mr Ford: I continue to fully support the creation of a Police Museum. However there remain some significant issues to be resolved before the outline business case can be submitted to Department of Finance and Personnel which include substantial planning issues and further consideration by PSNI of scale, location, access and throughput issues.

My officials continue to work with the RUC GC Foundation and PSNI to address these outstanding issues as a matter of priority to enable the business case to be finalised.

Department for Regional Development

Strangford Constituency: Unadopted Pumping Stations

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the unadopted pumping stations in the Strangford constituency which have outstanding agreements with NI Water or its predecessor.
(AQW 3479/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there are currently no agreements in Strangford Constituency solely for pumping stations as they are normally processed as part of a sewerage system package including sewers within a development site.

The information requested about unadopted pumping stations in the Strangford constituency is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Strangford Constituency: Unadopted Pumping Stations

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development which of the unadopted pumping stations in the Strangford constituency, which have an outstanding agreements with NI Water or its predecessor, have not been completed to the requisite adoption standard for more than (i) one year; (ii) three years; and (iii) five years.
(AQW 3481/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there are currently no agreements in Strangford Constituency solely for pumping stations as they are normally processed as part of a sewerage system package including sewers within a development site.

The information requested about unadopted pumping stations in the Strangford constituency is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Strangford Constituency: Unadopted Sewers

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development which of the unadopted sewers in the Strangford constituency, which have an outstanding agreement with NI Water or its predecessor, have not been completed to the requisite adoption standard for more than (i) one year; (ii) three years; and (iii) five years.
(AQW 3482/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are currently some 322 existing agreements in place with persons constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system, to adopt the system at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met. This includes agreements formerly with its predecessor Water Service which transferred to NIW on 1 April 2007.

It is the responsibility of the persons constructing the sewerage system to advise NIW when they consider it is completed to a satisfactory standard, to enable the system to be inspected and a Certificate of Completion to be issued with a view to future adoption.

The information requested about unadopted sewers in the Strangford constituency is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Connecting Europe Facility

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development how he plans to maximise the benefits to the local community following the announcement of significant funding for transport by the European Commission as part of the Connecting Europe Facility.
(AQW 3681/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) will provide funding to invest in transport infrastructure on the proposed 'Core' Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). However, under the

current proposals only Northern Ireland's Eastern Seaboard Corridor, between Larne, Belfast and the border with the Republic of Ireland, will be included on the 'Core' Network. In addition, CEF funding opportunities for transport infrastructure may be further restricted due to the Commission's preference for funding to be targeted at rail rather than road infrastructure.

I recently met with a range of key European contacts in Brussels, including the Head of Cabinet for the Commissioner for Transport, to seek support for the needs of peripheral regions like Northern Ireland to be taken into account. My officials also liaise with the Department for Transport in Whitehall to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests are being adequately articulated during the UK's engagement with the Commission.

The European Parliament and Council's deliberations on the proposals to establish the CEF provides an opportunity for amendment. In order to maximise the benefits to Northern Ireland from the CEF, my officials and I will continue to engage with the Commission and other influential parties to secure amendments, to provide further funding opportunities for Northern Ireland.

Connecting Europe Facility

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the potential for funding under the Connecting Europe Facility, whether his Department plans to prioritise the re-establishment of a railway line serving counties west of the Bann, including Fermanagh and Tyrone and connecting into counties such as Donegal, Leitrim and Cavan.
(AQW 3682/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As advised in response to AQW 3681/11-15, it is proposed that funding from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) will be made available for Member States to invest in transport infrastructure on the proposed 'Core' Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). Funding would not, therefore, be available under the CEF to re-establish rail links to counties Fermanagh and Tyrone and across the land frontier into Donegal, Leitrim and Cavan.

Within the budget available to me, my priority remains the maintenance and, where appropriate, the upgrading of the existing railway network.

Dannys Mill Road Area of Enniskillen: Raw Sewage

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on work to tackle the smell of potent raw sewage affecting the Danny's Mill Road area of Enniskillen; and what further measures his Department will put in place given that the problem persists.
(AQW 3683/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the installation of odour control equipment at 2 of the pumping stations serving the Danny's Mill Road area is now complete and this has resulted in a reduction in the odours emanating from the sewer. Two recent odour incidents were traced to a problem at Rossorry Pumping Station, which does not have odour control equipment installed. In each case mechanical breakdown resulted in sewage not being pumped from the station for a few days and the sewage in the station became septic. The odours occurred when the fault was repaired and pumping recommenced. The problem has now also been resolved.

In the longer term, NIW is considering a proposal to upgrade Rossorry Pumping Station and to relocate its pumping main to bypass the Danny's Mill Road area. However, this is a major scheme which would take at least 2 years to implement and would be dependent on the availability of funding and all necessary approvals being obtained.

Cherrymount Link Road in Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development how the opening of the Cherrymount Link Road in Enniskillen will affect the on-going congestion problems in the village of Tempo; and what plans his Department has to resolve the matter.
(AQW 3684/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the B80 route from Enniskillen through Tempo carries a two way flow of approximately 5,000 vehicles per day. It is anticipated that upon completion of the Cherrymount Link Road, some motorists may use the route via Tempo and Clabby to Fivemiletown, as opposed to using the main A4 trunk route from Enniskillen to Fivemiletown.

As with many rural villages, there are currently no waiting restrictions in Tempo. Occasionally, when motorists park their vehicles on both sides of the street, through traffic can be impeded and some delays can occur.

Roads Service's efforts over recent years to provide waiting restrictions in Tempo have been met with significant opposition from the local Development Group, Traders, Councillors and the local community. It is not normally possible for Roads Service to provide waiting restrictions without some local support.

After Cherrymount Link Road opens to traffic, which is scheduled for February 2013, Roads Service will monitor the changes in traffic movements and assess the need for any further adjustments to the surrounding roads network. If it is determined that waiting restrictions in Main Street in Tempo would be beneficial, it would be helpful if the local community was encouraged to reconsider the matter and support the introduction of waiting restrictions.

Enniskillen Courthouse: Parking

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact on parking in Enniskillen resulting from the Courts Service's decision to impose parking restrictions outside Enniskillen Courthouse.
(AQW 3685/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The waiting restrictions recently introduced outside Enniskillen Courthouse removed 23 limited waiting parking spaces from the 360 on-street parking spaces available in Enniskillen. In addition to these on-street parking spaces, my Department's Roads Service provides 1510 off-street car park spaces, of which 655 are pay and display and 855 are free of charge.

Consequently, the removal of 23 of Roads Service's 1870 parking spaces in Enniskillen has had little impact on the overall availability of a parking space within the town.

Gritting of Roads

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 2009/11-15 and given his pledge that his "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", whether Roads Service has greater, the same or less finance, labour and materials available than last year.
(AQW 3711/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In my response to AQW 2009/11-15, I advised that while my Department's Roads Service has no statutory obligation to salt roads, it does earmark funds with the aim of helping main road traffic to move safely and freely in wintry conditions, through the removal of snow and gritting of the salted road network across Northern Ireland.

Funds in the order of £5 million are normally earmarked for gritting. However, as it is not possible to accurately forecast the extent or the severity of future winter weather, it is not possible to determine if additional funding will be required in advance of each winter season. Should further funding be required, Roads Service will either bid for additional funds from the Assembly or redistribute funds from

within its overall roads maintenance budget, by reducing maintenance works and activities in other areas in the year in question.

With regard to the labour force available, I can advise the Member that Roads Service will have over 300 staff on standby for the incoming winter season, which is approximately the same as last winter.

With regard to the availability of materials, I can advise that a significant amount of pre-planning is carried out by Roads Service each year to ensure a state of readiness for the winter season. This planning includes the early purchase and receipt of salt to ensure that salt barns are filled to capacity, prior to the start of the winter.

Roads Service normally holds sufficient stocks of salt in these barns to provide the winter service programme for a full season, without the need to restock. However, following last year's severe weather, Roads Service has advised that it has reviewed these levels and increased stocks significantly. Roads Service is now holding around 110,000 tonnes of salt compared to around 65,000 tonnes held in previous years. It also has arrangements in place to supplement stocks of salt during the winter period, if necessary.

Whilst it not never possible to accurately forecast the extent or the severity winter weather, I am confident that Roads Service has sufficient finance, labour and materials in place to satisfactorily carry out the Winter Service programme for the incoming winter season.

Magilligan Ferry

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on securing the future of the Magilligan Ferry since the issue was raised at the recent North/South Ministerial Council meeting.
(AQW 3733/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have confirmed that my Department was not involved in the setting up of this ferry service, nor does it have any operational responsibility for it. In addition, the Department for Regional Development does not have the legislative vires to support such a ferry service.

A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the delays to the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass, whether he would consider initiating planning proposals for a ring-road round Enniskillen.
(AQW 3741/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that while progress with the proposed A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass has been slow, the scheme remains the highest priority strategic road improvement proposal for the town. Together with the Cherrymount Link Road scheme, the Bypass will make a significant contribution to the easement of traffic congestion in and around Enniskillen.

There are no proposals to develop a ring road around Enniskillen and such a proposal would undoubtedly be extremely costly. Given the current funding pressures, initiating the planning process for a ring road would not provide good value for money.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.
(AQW 3744/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months, to 30 September 2011, is provided below.

Travel Costs	Minister	Departmental Officials
Total	£13,720	£2,172,861

The 'Departmental Officials' expenditure does not include overtime mileage, nor does it include mileage incurred by Roads Service industrial staff using their own vehicles. Overtime mileage and Industrial Staff standard mileage could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Salt or Grit in Storage

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what tonnage of salt or grit is currently in storage for use by Roads Service during the winter gritting schedule; and what was the comparable amount at this time last year.
(AQW 3776/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Prior to the start of each winter service season, my Department's Roads Service carries out a significant amount of planning, including the early purchase of an adequate stock of salt with the aim of meeting the needs of the full winter service programme without the need to re-stock.

Last year, Roads Service salt stocks amounted to some 65,000 tonnes. However, following last year's severe weather, Roads Service has reviewed its assessment and has increased salt stocks significantly, to approximately 110,000 tonnes. In addition, Roads Service has arrangements in place to supplement salt stocks during the winter period, if necessary.

Grit supplies, as opposed to salt supplies, are more readily available from local quarries and are therefore purchased, as required, by local section offices.

Phosphoric Acid in Drinking Water

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the reasons for the use of phosphoric acid in drinking water and for his assessment of its use.
(AQW 3792/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that all major water supplies in Northern Ireland are modified through the addition of orthophosphoric acid in the treatment process. The use of orthophosphoric acid in the water treatment process enables a protective coating to be formed over lead pipes to minimise the levels of soluble lead in the water supply. Its use has been approved by the Drinking Water Inspectorate. Orthophosphoric treatment is used across the United Kingdom water industry as an effective process to assist in achieving compliance with the European standards for lead in drinking water which apply at the consumer's tap. During 2010, 99.53% of samples taken from the regulatory sampling programmes complied with the current lead standard of 25µg/l and 95.77% complied with the stricter lead standard of 10µg/l which applies at the end of December 2013. NIW continues to work towards achieving compliance with the lead standards.

The process is an effective way of reducing consumers' exposure to lead where it has been used as the material for service pipes, mostly linking the water main and the kitchen tap, or in domestic plumbing.

A5 Project

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the process for making changes to the A5 project.
(AQW 3820/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that changes to the A5 project will materialise primarily through the Public Inquiry process. During the Public Inquiry hearings, which were held between 9 May and 1 July 2011, the independent Inspectors heard representations from over 500

people. These representations often included suggested changes, such as alternatives, omissions or additions to the scheme, as presented by Roads Service.

In some cases, Roads Service has accepted the suggested changes and these will be incorporated into the scheme. Where Roads Service does not agree with the suggested changes, the independent Inspectors will make recommendations.

The Inspectors are currently considering the merits of all the suggested changes presented at the Public Inquiry and it is expected that they will report back to the Department before the end of the year. Roads Service will then comment on the Inspectors' report and recommendations.

Once this takes place, I will consider all issues and make decisions in relation to the project. These decisions will address both strategic and local issues and will be reflected in the Departmental Statement, which I expect will be published in Spring 2012.

Accidents Resulting from Uneven Road Surfaces

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many claims were made against his Department because of accidents resulting from uneven road surfaces in the North Down area in each of the last three years; and how much compensation was paid as a result of these claims.
(AQW 3826/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service records information on claims for compensation by Roads Service Section Office area. The North Down Section Office area is almost identical to the North Down Borough Council area. Details of the number of compensation claims resulting from carriageway defects and the amount of compensation paid in each of the last three years, for the Roads Service North Down Section Office area are provided in the table below:

Year	Claims Received	Compensation Paid
2008/2009	16	£17,925.43
2009/2010	31	£3,620.52
2010/2011	42	£17,906.34

It should be noted that liability was denied in 27 of the claims received during this period and three claims are still being processed.

Blue Badges

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many blue badges have been granted in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3828/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Blue Badges issued by my Department's Roads Service, since 1 April 2006, are provided in the table below:

Financial Year	Total Number of Blue Badges issued
1/04/2006 – 31/03/2007	31,324
1/04/2007 – 31/03/2008	31,804
1/04/2008 – 31/03/2009	33,097
1/04/2009 – 31/03/2010	30,720
1/04/2010 – 31/03/2011	35,205
1/04/2011 – 28/10/2011	22,787

Translink: Maintenance Work on Buses

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Translink staff are given a time limit within which to complete maintenance work on buses.
(AQW 3837/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me that they do not put time limits on completing maintenance work on buses. They employ experienced Supervisors who are in charge of monitoring quality and efficiency of the work output. They can gauge how long each task may take. However they recognise that even when completing similar tasks on different vehicles, the time taken can vary due to differing circumstances that can arise.

Translink: Maintenance Work on Buses

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development whether it is best practice for Translink staff, who are carrying out maintenance work on a bus, to complete that work before starting work on another bus.
(AQW 3840/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me that it is normal practice to complete tasks once they have been initiated, however it is necessary to continually monitor priorities. This may mean that if a tradesperson is working on a particularly difficult and extended task and a simpler task presents, it may be prudent for the supervisor to transfer the tradesperson from the difficult task to deal with the simple one, as this will have a more immediate effect on vehicle availability.

Furthermore, there are times when parts are not readily available and have to be ordered. In these situations the tradesperson is better utilised on other tasks until the part arrives.

Secondments

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many departmental staff are currently seconded to external bodies.
(AQW 3869/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As at 28 October 2011, a total of six staff within my Department were seconded to external bodies.

Speed Limits

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to change speed limits.
(AQW 3899/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has powers to set or amend speed limits under Article 38 of Part IV of The Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

The latest Roads Service policy document, Setting Local Speed Limits in Northern Ireland, was published in April 2010. This provides guidance for traffic engineers to assess a suitable speed limit for any road under consideration. It also contains a commitment for Roads Service to review the speed limits for the entire Upper Tier rural road network within five years of the publication of the policy.

The policy document can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address: www.roadsni.gov.uk/local_speed_limits_ni_e051_.pdf

Roads Service and the Rivers Agency: Collaboration

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development what mechanisms exist to allow collaboration between Roads Service and the Rivers Agency when combating flooding.
(AQW 3904/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service plays a key role in the Flood Liaison Groups (FLGs), which promote cooperation and coordination between the main organisations required to respond to flooding incidents, namely Rivers Agency, Northern Ireland Water, Roads Service, NI Fire and Rescue Service and Local Government Emergency Management Group (LGEMG). These groups maintain and review, on an ongoing basis, a schedule of combined Multi Agency Flooding hotspots.

At a strategic level, Roads Service has Directorate representation and actively participates on the Flood Strategy Steering Group (FSSG), which oversees and formulates policy and gives guidance to the Flood Liaison Groups to ensure cooperation and coordination between the main organisations, as required.

At an operational level, the Flood Liaison Group has developed a Best Practice Guidelines (BPG) document, which provides a framework for the three drainage agencies to coordinate their response to flooding incidents. This document establishes lines of communications and reporting across agencies.

Car Parking Charges

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the timescale for the proposed introduction of car parking charges in car parks which are currently free.
(AQW 3918/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is in the process of implementing an increase in car parking tariffs in charged car parks, which was formally approved in July 2010. The review of tariffs also includes a proposal to introduce charging to a number of car parks that were previously free. A list of these car parks has been placed in the Assembly Library.

I can advise that Roads Service is currently dealing with a number of objections received in relation to the proposed introduction of charges. In these circumstances, it is not possible to be definitive about timing, however, it is hoped that the proposals can be implemented within the current financial year.

A5 Road Project

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the proposed A5 road project is a key priority for his Department.
(AQW 3938/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: With two thirds of Roads Service's capital funding for this Budget period, almost £800 million, presently allocated to the A5 Londonderry to Aughnacloy and the A8 Belfast to Larne dual carriageways, the A5 is indeed a key priority for my Department.

As you will be aware, the A5 dual carriageway project is being brought forward as part of an agreement between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, to provide dual carriageways between the border at Aughnacloy and Londonderry, and on the A8 between Belfast and Larne. The Irish Government has committed to make a £400 million contribution towards both projects.

Public inquiries for both schemes were held in May and June 2011. The Inspector's report for the A8 has been received and the report for the A5 is expected by the end of this year. In conjunction with the Independent Inspector's report and recommendations arising from the A5 and A8 public inquiries, I intend to consider proposed investment levels across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme.

Ballyquin Road to the Greystone Roundabout in Limavady: 30 mph Section

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of accidents resulting in personal injury on the 30 mph section of the Ballyquin Road to the Greystone Roundabout in Limavady in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3942/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of collisions resulting in personal injury on the 30 mph section of the Ballyquin Road to the Greystone Roundabout in Limavady, in each of the last five years, are set out in the table below:

Year	Number of recorded Personal Injury Collisions
2006	2
2007	0
2008	1
2009	2
2010	1

Belfast and Sligo: Road Links

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the plans to improve road links between Belfast and Sligo, with particular reference to the A4/N16 from the Ballygawley Roundabout to Sligo.
(AQW 3969/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has carried out very significant road improvement schemes along the A4 Belfast to Sligo route in recent years. Improvements have included the new 20km dual carriageway between Dungannon and Ballygawley and a 3.8km road realignment at Annaghilla, both of which opened to traffic in 2010. These developments are in addition to the provision of a number of other schemes to improve overtaking between Ballygawley and Enniskillen and a significant road widening scheme at the Henry Street / Sligo Road junction in Enniskillen. Cumulatively, these schemes have made a significant contribution to journey time savings and road safety along the A4 route.

Looking to the future, design and development of the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass continues to progress, and a proposal for a bypass of Fivemiletown is also currently included in the Investment Delivery Plan for Roads. I would anticipate that the ten year Strategic Road Improvement Programme will be reviewed in due course, when a new Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland has been agreed.

A4/N16: Upgrade

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his discussions with Leo Varadkar, TD regarding the upgrade of the existing A4/N16.
(AQW 3970/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the member that I have had no discussions with Leo Varadkar, TD regarding the upgrade of the existing A4/N16.

Castlewellan Road in Banbridge

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Regional Development when the Castlewellan Road in Banbridge will be resurfaced.
(AQW 3977/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Castlewellan Road, Banbridge, remains within the maintenance period for road reinstatements completed following excavations by utility companies. During this period, utility companies have a statutory responsibility to maintain the reinstatements, including dealing with any significant settlement that may occur. Consequently, Roads Service does not plan to resurface the road until the maintenance period has expired.

However, subject to the availability of funding and confirmation that the various utility companies have no further works planned for this stretch of road, Roads Service plans to resurface the Castlewellan Road during the early part of 2013.

Millennium Way in Lurgan

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the completion of the Millennium Way in Lurgan.
(AQW 3980/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the route selection and preliminary design of the Millennium Way scheme in Lurgan has been completed. Planning approval has also been obtained, with a view to advancing the Vesting Order and completing the detailed design.

I should also explain that the limited funding available for capital improvements is already fully committed to a programme of major improvement schemes on the strategic road network. Furthermore, Budget 2010 and the reduction in the Executive's capital funding, means that there are sizeable pressures on the capital budget within my Department.

Difficult choices will have to be made over the next four years to deliver the best services and infrastructure in water, sewerage, roads, and public transport. I therefore intend to consider the proposed investment across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010, and explore opportunities for bringing forward schemes, such as Millennium Way in Lurgan.

Translink Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether he has any plans to reduce the number of staff at Translink (a) bus; and (b) rail stations; (ii) if so, how many staff will be affected by (a) redundancy; and (b) redeployment; and (iii) what impact these changes will have on the service to the public.
(AQW 4000/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink is responsible for operational matters of this kind. Each year, discussions take place about the nature of Translink's plans in the year ahead and over a 3 year timeframe. This takes account of Translink costs and revenue projections and the level of resources that my department can provide. This year, fares have not increased and Translink continues to find ways of optimising bus and rail services to minimise costs. This can have implications for staff. Translink have advised me that negotiations with the Unions have just recently been completed in this context. The service changes have been implemented for this year and were consulted upon. Detailed discussions between the Department and Translink on plans for 2012/2013 to 2014/2015 have yet to take place. It would be premature to comment on any decisions in advance of these discussions.

Larne Railway

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development when the public address systems at the stations on the Larne Railway line will be repaired.
(AQW 4001/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised that the Long Line Public Address (LLPA) system on the Larne line is approximately 20 years old and has experienced reliability problems over the last several years. NI Railways continuously monitor LLPA performance and repair as necessary. Obsolete and unreliable components of the system will be replaced on a phased basis over the next 12 months.

Septic Tanks: Free Desludging

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he would allow individuals, who have already benefited from free desludging of septic tanks and who were affected by the recent

flooding of rural areas, to receive a second free desludging of their tanks from NI Water in light of the extenuating circumstances caused by the floods.
(AQW 4093/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its current policy provides for a septic tank desludging, free of charge, once per year. If the septic tank is functioning properly, with the outlet of the tank discharging freely to a watercourse or soak-away, it would be unusual for the contents of the tank to be affected by flooding. However, if a soak away became saturated it is possible that the contents could not be released from the tank. This would be a matter for the customer to address the problem with the tank outlet or soakaway. In such circumstances, there would be no benefit in emptying the tank until the problem with the soakaway was resolved as the tank would simply refill.

Department for Social Development

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.
(AQW 3696/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The details requested in respect of travel costs incurred are provided below:

TRAVEL COSTS	01/10/10 TO 30/09/11 Net Cost £
Minister	2,315
Departmental Officials	1,179,634

The details provided include costs of official travel by air, sea and land together with any subsistence payable and reimbursement of other associated costs such as accommodation and car parking charges.

These costs must be considered in the context of the 7,000 plus staff working in the Department.

Motability Cars

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new motability cars have been issued in each of the last five years, broken down by make of car.
(AQW 3763/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Motability Scheme whereby people who receive the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance may exchange all or part of their allowance in return for a car is administrated by the independent charity Motability. Information on administrative matters can be obtained from Motability by writing to: Declan O'Mahony, Director, Motability, Warwick House, Roydon Road, Harlow, and Essex, CM19 5PX. The amounts paid to Motability in each of the last 5 years are as follows:

Year	Amount paid
2010/11	£1,003,000
2009/10	£1,058,000
2008/09	£1,097,000
2007/08	£861,000
2006/07	£600,000

The figures are taken from the Department for Social Development's Resource Accounts annual reports.

Motability Cars

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of motability cars in use in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3764/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Motability Scheme whereby people who receive the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance may exchange all or part of their allowance in return for a car is administrated by the independent charity Motability. Information on administrative matters can be obtained from Motability by writing to: Declan O'Mahony, Director, Motability, Warwick House, Roydon Road, Harlow, and Essex, CM19 5PX. The amounts paid to Motability in each of the last 5 years are as follows:

Year	Amount paid
2010/11	£1,003,000
2009/10	£1,058,000
2008/09	£1,097,000
2007/08	£861,000
2006/07	£600,000

The figures are taken from the Department for Social Development's Resource Accounts annual reports

Department's Budget

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding the Westminster Government has allocated for the social security aspects of his Department's budget in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 3770/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table below. Figures shown reflect net social security related expenditure incurred in the last 3 financial years and includes the Department's own running costs. Expenditure figures have been shown as these were the amounts ultimately funded by Her Majesty's Government.

TABLE: SOCIAL SECURITY RELATED EXPENDITURE (£MILLION)

2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
4,623	5,001	5,152

Enniskillen and Newry: Cross-border Trade

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the amount of cross-border trade in Enniskillen and Newry and the sale of large quantities of alcohol as a result of the price differential, what consideration he has given to meeting his counterpart in the Dublin Government to discuss setting a minimum price for alcohol across the island.
(AQW 3811/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In March, my Department launched a joint consultation with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) on the introduction of minimum pricing of alcohol. The consultation closed on 26 June and responses are currently being analysed. An options paper is being developed for consideration by Health Minister Poots and I before a decision on the way forward is taken.

I recognise that the possible introduction of minimum unit pricing could lead to unintended consequences, such as increases in cross border sales. This would be dependent on the price differential between alcohol products in Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

I understand that, through the North South Ministerial Council Health and Food Safety Sectoral Group, DHSSPS has had discussions with counterparts from the Government in the Republic of Ireland in relation to policy in both jurisdictions in respect of preventing and addressing alcohol related harm. The role of minimum unit pricing has been discussed at these meetings, however, acknowledging in particular the need to clarify the legal position, there are no definitive proposals at this time.

I am also aware that DHSSPS have agreed to hold a joint North/South conference on alcohol misuse in early 2012, and this will cover a wide range of policy issues.

Antrim Town Area: Supported "Fold Type" Housing

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether his Department is aware of the lack of supported 'fold type' housing in the Antrim town area; and (ii) to outline any future capital projects that will address this shortage.
(AQW 3824/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The latest waiting list figures for Antrim Town indicate that the number of applicants requiring older persons accommodation has increased and additional housing is therefore required. However, there may not necessarily be a need for sheltered accommodation. The Housing Executive will carry out a survey in 2012 to identify the extent of the need for this type of housing. No sites are readily available in the area and through its Unmet Needs Prospectus the Housing Executive is currently advertising for a suitable location on which to build.

Newbuild and Maintenance Projects

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has to create a fairer balance between new build and maintenance projects.
(AQW 3838/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Whilst a recent report from Savills highlighted the excellent overall quality of Housing Executive homes, I remain concerned that there are small pockets of homes out there which are in urgent need of modernisation and refurbishment.

I am also concerned that so much of the existing stock is single glazed and this is simply not acceptable at a time when we need to do more to help people stay warm this winter and out of Fuel Poverty.

I have asked the Housing Executive to bring forward plans to dramatically increase the speed at which they can bring their stock up to standard and that includes double glazing for all their homes. I have also asked them to look at more innovative ways this can be delivered in light of the challenging economic climate all Departments face. This should include the potential to transfer the worst of their stock to Housing Associations who may be better placed to bring in the additional, private finance needed for the most urgent of improvements.

I also plan to see how we can increase the level of private finance in the delivery of new housing so we can make that resource go even further and will be happy to release more information on all this work in the coming months as it progresses.

Social Landlords

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how social landlords currently help their tenants cope with high energy prices; and (ii) how much funding his Department has provided for these measures in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3907/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently helps it tenants cope with high energy prices in a number of ways, including: - .

- Making homes as energy efficient as possible through planned maintenance programmes, including heating replacements with controls, topping up loft insulation, providing cavity wall insulation where required and installing double glazing when windows require replacement.
- Providing energy efficiency advice via the Heatsmart programme.
- Funding Bryson Energy to provide an independent advice service to the general public.
- Funding National Energy Action (NEA), the fuel poverty charity.

In addition, the Housing Executive has carried out double glazing and insulation to thousands of homes. However these measures have been undertaken as part of External Cyclical Maintenance schemes and the costs cannot be disaggregated. The Housing Executive is also currently drawing up tender documents for a potential brokering scheme for discounted electricity for tenants.

The Housing Executive has provided £1.3m funding to the agencies mentioned above, as set out in the table below: -

	2006/07 £k	**2007/08 £k**	**2008/09 £k**	**2009/10 £k**	**2010/11 £k**
Heatsmart	121	124	124	124	124
National Energy Action	40	40	40	40	111
Energy Efficiency Advice	95	105	95	95	24
Total	**256**	**269**	**259**	**259**	**259**

The Housing Executive also spent £118.8m in relation to heating schemes over the last five years, as follows: -

	2006/07 £k	**2007/08 £k**	**2008/09 £k**	**2009/10 £k**	**2010/11 £k**
Heating	208	173	129	200	210
Heat Servicing	52	54	61	49	52
Total	**260**	**227**	**190**	**249**	**262**

In relation to Housing Associations, there are a variety of measures they take, for example, a number help by building energy efficient homes to 'Code 3 and 4' including solar panels and heat recovery systems if possible. Economy 7 heating systems have in the main been removed and most dwellings now have gas or oil heating. In addition, a number of Housing Associations take advantage of Cosy Homes schemes to keep their houses properly insulated and draught-proofed, including cavity wall insulation. Housing Associations also advise that they ensure that their houses are well maintained through planned maintenance schemes. Some have changed their fuel provider which has resulted in tenants benefitting from a reduction in the service charges which covers the cost of lighting all communal areas of flats and some are investigating the possibility of bulk purchasing fuel.

Finally, in 2009 the Department of Social Development made a £150 Household Fuel Payment to 167,000 households, to assist with the spiralling cost of heating. However it is not possible to provide figures for which recipients were social housing tenants. I am also working with the Housing Executive to develop a programme that will see all properties double glazed as soon as possible. In the interim I have secured additional funds of £2m in the October Monitoring round to enable the Housing Executive to replace single glazed windows with double glazing and additional insulation measures to tackle the thermal efficiency of individual homes.

Energy Brokering Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking in response to the Energy Brokering Report.
(AQW 3924/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is currently considering testing the market for discounted electricity on behalf of tenants. Both the Housing Executive Energy Conservation Unit and Procurement Department have been researching similar schemes located elsewhere and expect to market test the scheme within this financial year.

Ards Peninsula: Areas at Risk

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the areas in the Ards Peninsula that are designated as Areas at Risk.
(AQW 3925/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are two areas within the Ards Peninsula that are designated as Areas of Risk. They are Scrabo in Newtownards and Beechfield in Donaghadee.

Temperature Variances

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development if his Department has investigated whether there are significant temperature variances between the Ballykelly Met Office site and the proposed Magilligan temperature monitoring site.
(AQW 3966/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Met Office advises that the observation site at Magilligan is a new site replacing the site at Ballykelly. The site at Ballykelly will be decommissioned as the land it is on is being sold by the MoD. There are no contemporaneous records for the two sites which would allow for a meaningful comparison.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development why the Boiler Replacement Scheme has to conform with Building Control, when this could potentially add upwards of £1000 to the cost of replacing a boiler, therefore creating a financial burden for those it aims to support.
(AQW 4002/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Before introducing the Boiler Replacement Scheme at the beginning of July 2011 the Housing Executive consulted with Building Control to determine what their requirements would be. As a result of this consultation the Housing Executive was satisfied that there was no requirement under Building Control regulations to provide additional controls where an oil boiler was being replaced with a new oil boiler. An applicant may choose to fit these controls if he/she wishes but it is likely to cost in the region of an additional £600 to do so. In the circumstances where an oil boiler is being replaced by a gas boiler it is, however, a requirement of the Building Control regulations that full controls are also provided.

However, all 26 district councils are autonomous and there have been some differences in interpretation of Building Control Regulations among them. These differences have centred mainly on the need or otherwise for the controls mentioned above. Initially there were differing views among the Councils on this but it now seems to be generally accepted that the provision of full controls is not required when replacing “like for like” boilers. However, some Councils are now asking for the provision of a remote wireless thermostat control instead. Again this is not a Building Regulations requirement and the Housing Executive did not specify such a thermostat within the scheme. The reasons for this are:

a) While the thermostat would switch off the boiler at a certain temperature the householder could not heat the water separately. It is therefore not considered to be a suitable control;

b) The Allowance of £1500 for the boiler replacement scheme had already been determined and publicised. Specifying a wireless thermostat would add an extra cost to the householder of between £120 and £150. As applicants for the scheme are in receipt of a means tested benefit it was not considered appropriate to put them to the extra expense.

In some areas the Boiler Replacement Scheme is progressing well with good cooperation and input from Building Control. However, in other areas such as the West and Derry City Council area there still seem to differing views on this matter. In Derry City Council the Building Control section is awaiting the return of the Chief Building Control Officer for the area, who is presently in Australia, to make a final decision on the subject. In the meantime there is some confusion among installers in the area as to the precise requirements of Building Control in relation to boiler replacement, and some of them will not proceed with the installation of replacement boilers until the area Building Control clarify the matter.

At present the central Building Control Standards Panel is trying to ensure consistency of approach among all the councils.

Double Glazing Scheme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration he has given to introducing a double glazing scheme to make homes more energy efficient and to address fuel poverty for the most vulnerable in society.
(AQW 4003/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has a number of window replacement schemes included in their planned maintenance programme this financial year which will see work carried out to over 3,200 homes. In addition, the Housing Executive Board has set the objective of having all their properties double glazed by 2021.

However, I am working with the Housing Executive to develop a programme that will see all properties double glazed as soon as possible. In the interim I have secured additional funds of £2m in the October Monitoring round to enable the Housing Executive to replace single glazed windows with double glazing and additional insulation measures to tackle the thermal efficiency of individual homes. Much housing association stock already has double glazing and most associations have advised that they intend to replace any remaining single-glazed windows with double glazing in their planned programme of works.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Translation of Ulster Scots

Mr Dallat asked the Assembly Commission how many times Ulster-Scots was spoken in Assembly plenary sessions over the last twelve months; and to detail the cost of translation for this period.
(AQW 3560/11-15)

Mr Cree (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission confirm that, other than an occasional word, no Ulster-Scots was spoken during plenary sittings in the last 12 months. In addition, no money was spent on the provision of Ulster-Scots translation services for plenary sittings.

Staff

Mr Dallat asked the Assembly Commission to detail the total number of staff employed by the Assembly Commission in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) annual salary.
(AQW 3563/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Staff figures for each year are reported in the Assembly's Resource Accounts. Copes of the Accounts for each year are held on the Assembly's website at http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/corporate/resource_accounts.htm.

Staff numbers are based on the average number of staff employed over the course of the year. Only those staff that were engaged by the Assembly Commission are reported below. As noted in the Resource Accounts, the Commission also used the services of staff on an "Agency" basis in each of the three years.

For data protection reasons, the actual salaries for individual members of staff is not disclosed. The salary band for each grade has been provided.

For the 2008/09 financial year, the figures are shown below in Table 1.

TABLE 1 – STAFF NUMBERS AND SALARY SCALES FOR 2008/09

Assembly Grade	Average Number of Staff	Salary Band
AG1	1	£100,000 - £160,000
AG2	5	£64,820 - £80,111
AG3	4	£43,600 - £62,407
AG4	39	£37,322 - £50,796
AG5	21	£28,153 - £38,893
AG6	56	£22,621 - £30,520
AG7	17	£19,592 - £26,086
AG8	85	£16,683 - £22,718
AG9	50	£14,060 - £20,109
Total	**278**	

For the 2009/10 financial year, the figures are shown below in Table 2.

TABLE 2 - STAFF NUMBERS AND SALARY SCALES FOR 2009/10

Assembly Grade	Average Number of Staff	Salary Band
AG1	1	£100,000 - £160,000
AG2	6	£65,528 - £80,111
AG3	6	£53,657 - £62,407
AG4	39	£41,391 - £50,796
AG5	24	£32,643 - £38,893
AG6	80	£27,764 - £30,520
AG7	36	£23,066 - £26,086
AG8	63	£19,450 - £22,988
AG9	74	£15,277 - £20,799
Total	**329**	

For the 2010/11 financial year, the figures are shown below in Table 3. It should be noted that the information in Table 3 reflects a revised eight grade staffing structure implemented from 4 May 2010.

TABLE 3 - STAFF NUMBERS AND SALARY SCALES FOR 2010/11

Assembly Grade	Number of Staff	Salary Band
AG1	1	£115,216 - £130,519
AG2	6	£72,010 - £81,922
AG3	8	£57,608 - £65,259
AG4	39	£46,806 - £53,056
AG5	36	£36,485 - £41,331
AG6	82	£29,543 - £33,446
AG7	100	£24,004 - £27,357
AG8	118	£17,521 - £22,180
Total	**390**	

The total figures for each year including staff used on an Agency or temporary basis are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4 - TOTAL STAFF NUMBERS

	Employees	Agency Staff	TOTAL
2008/09	278	99	377
2009/10	329	62	391
2010/11	390	26	416

Within the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Assembly Commission is committed to reducing its budgetary requirements (including its staffing levels) by 2014/15.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 18 November 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Capital Investment Projects: Shortfalls

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration has been given to making use of the borrowing powers of local councils to fund shortfalls in capital investment projects.

(AQW 3163/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The potential to use district councils' borrowing powers to draw in additional private investment is currently being explored.

Arm's-length Bodies: Value for Money Audits

Mr S Anderson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department has (a) carried out any value for money audits on the arm's-length bodies it funds; and (b) identified any savings that could be made by these bodies.

(AQW 3329/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM assesses value for money through the business case approval process for individual items of expenditure.

OFMDFM has identified a number of savings that can be made by the Arm's Length Bodies it funds through the savings delivery plans published by the Department as part of the Budget 2010 process.

The Department is participating in the Arm's Length Body Review being conducted centrally by the Budget Review Group to establish the scope for abolition, merger or absorption into Departmental structures of each body. The Budget Review Group will convey its recommendations to the Executive in due course.

Asset Management Unit

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress the Asset Management Unit has made in delivering £10 million in additional capital receipts in this financial year to date; and to provide a breakdown of these receipts.

(AQW 3844/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: To date, 10 assets with a value of some £1.6 million have been sold, subject to confirmation of contract. A further 41 assets are currently on the market with a total valuation of around £10 million. In addition, 9 assets have been identified as suitable for transfer for social housing with a total valuation of some £4.7m.

The Asset Management Unit has also appointed a panel of agents to enable a further 14 assets to be marketed. In some cases, the initial valuations need to be reviewed by Land and Property Services to reflect current market values.

Strategic Investment Board

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what was the total cost incurred by the Strategic Investment Board in commissioning a report on the sustainability of St Mary's University College, Belfast.

(AQW 3901/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The total cost incurred by the Strategic Investment Board in commissioning a report on the sustainability of St Mary's University College, Belfast was £53,250 plus VAT.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department plans to conduct any assessment into the impact of Hydraulic Fracturing on agriculture and rural development; and whether she has any concerns about the process of Hydraulic Fracturing.

(AQW 4018/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department has no plans to conduct an assessment into the impact of Hydraulic Fracturing on agriculture and rural development.

I am aware that the activity is regulated and that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is responsible for licensing the exploration of potential gas fields.

Planning permission would be necessary for any drilling to take place and the Department of Environment would determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is also required.

I am both personally and politically concerned about the process of Hydraulic Fracturing and its effects on the environment on the island of Ireland.

Committee on Climate Change Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the recent report by the Committee for Climate Change 'The Appropriateness of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act'; and what action she will take to focus research and development towards developing measurement and mitigation strategies for greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector.

(AQW 4114/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Minister for the Environment asked the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) to investigate and report on the appropriateness of a local Climate Change Act. I believe he is considering their report in his lead role on Climate Change issues.

I welcome the CCC references to agriculture being of key importance to the local economy and that the sector's scope for emissions reductions is limited compared to other sectors, for example power, heat and transport. Nevertheless the Report concludes that there is opportunity for significant agri-emissions reductions over the next decade from improvements in production efficiency. This is an area where my Department is actively working with agriculture and forestry stakeholders to identify measures which can reduce emissions and enhance production efficiencies. This voluntary approach is, I believe, the most appropriate way forward.

I also need to consider how lowering carbon can complement and not compete with sustainable growth objectives in the agri-food sector. Exporting jobs and or production or limiting local growth potential due to imposition of reduction targets is not considered a sensible approach and may actually increase GHGs if production takes place in other regions and countries that are less efficient.

My Department has a detailed programme of research underway on mitigation of agriculture GHGs which includes carbon footprinting of dairy and beef systems, breeding strategies, carbon sequestration and on the types of chemical fertilizer best suited to local atmospheric and soil conditions. My Department also co-fund the development of the agriculture GHG Inventory to better measure naturally occurring emissions and which will result in revised measurement techniques being available in 2014/15.

Beragh, County Tyrone: Flooding

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) who is leading the review into the recent flooding in Beragh, County Tyrone; (ii) what is the timeframe for this review; and (iii) whether the review will be extended to cover all the areas which were affected by the flooding.

(AQW 4150/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have asked my Assembly Private Secretary Pat Doherty MP, MLA to undertake a review into the operational performance of my Rivers Agency during the October flooding events. This review will include the recent flooding events in Beragh.

A written report, supported by documentary evidence and including recommendations for improvement is to be completed by 18 November 2011.

As referred to above, the review will cover all the areas which were affected by flooding.

Department's Independent Panel

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the appointments process for her Department's Independent Panel closed for applications; and how many applications were received.

(AQW 4194/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The deadline for applications closed on 9 September 2011 and there were 35 applications received.

Department's Independent Panel

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she received notification of the successful applicants for appointment to her Department's Independent Panel.

(AQW 4195/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The interview process for the recruitment of new members to my Department's Independent Panel is still ongoing and should conclude at the end of November. I anticipate receiving notification of the outcome of the appointment process in December.

Department's Independent Panel

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she asked for a revision to be made to the list of successful appointees to her Department's Independent Panel.

(AQW 4196/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not asked for a revision to be made to the list of successful appointees to my Department's Independent Panel. No list currently exists.

Department's Independent Panel

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when successful appointees will be notified of their appointment to her Department's Independent Panel.

(AQW 4197/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is intended to notify successful appointees of their appointment in January 2012.

Beragh, County Tyrone: Flooding

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the terms of reference of the review into the recent flooding in Beragh, County Tyrone.

(AQW 4223/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: During the month of October 2011 a number of slow moving, narrow bands of intense rainfall moved across the north of Ireland and caused flooding to a number of residential and business properties including some located in Beragh. As a result I have asked my Assembly Private Secretary Pat Doherty MP, MLA to undertake an investigation into theoperational performance of my Rivers Agency during the October flooding incidents and report by 18 November 2011. The written report is to be supported by documentary evidence and include recommendations for improvement. The investigation is to address:

Before the Event:

(i) Actions taken to put contingency plans into operation and state of readiness. To include availability of emergency response plan and records of and testing of the plan; incorporation of lessons learnt from earlier severe weather incidents.

(ii) During the Event: Actions taken to prioritise and respond to incoming calls to Rivers Agency offices and the Flooding Incident Line. To include comparison of the operational performance with that recorded in 2008 and 2009 flooding events and to consider any action points from earlier events which remain resolved.

(iii) After the Event: Actions taken to effect emergency/repair works, where required, and internal review completed of the response.

In addition, the investigation should consider the nature and level of communication throughout the event, including the co-ordination with and co-operation with other statutory agencies.

Ilex Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, with regard to Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from her current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4224/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I met with representatives of Ilex Urban Regeneration on 2nd November 2011 in Derry and we had a very positive and constructive discussion about the One plan.

My Department has not been approached with regard to funding for the One plan for the Derry regeneration programme, however, any future requests will be fully considered.

Waterways in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has to desilt the waterways in North Down.

(AQW 4243/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The North Down area has watercourses which are designated under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 and for which my Rivers Agency has a maintenance responsibility. Watercourses are categorised as "urban" or "rural". Generally urban open watercourses are inspected and maintained on a yearly basis, while rural watercourses are inspected and maintained at least every six years.If significant localised accumulations of silt are encountered in watercourses during routine maintenance inspections, consideration is given to their removal in order that a free flow of water in the watercourses can be preserved. Such removal of silt must be carried out in accordance with any relevant environmental legislation. Many undesignated open watercourses are also located in the North Down area and the maintenance responsibility for these rests with the riparian occupiers of the land.

CAP Reform

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why it was necessary for departmental staff to pigeon-hole a letter on CAP Reform, dated 9 November, to each MLA in an unmarked A4 envelope.

(AQW 4322/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In issuing the Public Consultation on EU Commission Proposals for CAP Reform post 2013, DARD officials followed the July 2011 OFMDFM Guidance on the Distribution of Publications and Consultation Documents.

Flooding Review

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what she expects to achieve from the review into the recent flooding.

(AQW 4329/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have asked my Assembly Private Secretary Pat Doherty MP, MLA to undertake an investigation into the October 2011 flooding incidents. The investigation will cover:

(i) The mechanisms of the emergency response;

(ii) A comparison of the performance in October 2011 with that recorded in 2008 and 2009 flooding events, including any action points from earlier events which remain to be resolved; and (iii) Communications around the emergency including coordination and cooperation with other statutory agencies.

The key outputs of the investigation will be an assessment of my Rivers Agency's performance in preparation for and during the flood events of October 2011 and recommendations for improvement where appropriate.

Beragh, County Tyrone: Flooding

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people will be on the review team to consider the flooding at Beragh, County Tyrone; and what criteria will be used to appoint members.

(AQW 4393/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have asked my Assembly Private Secretary Pat Doherty MP, MLA to undertake an investigation into the October 2011 flooding incidents. He will request whatever evidence and analysis he requires from officials in my Rivers Agency and report to me by 18 November 2011.

Specifically with regard to flood alleviation works in Beragh the recent flooding will be considered with the context of the overall design of the scheme.

Beragh, County Tyrone: Flooding

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the application process for membership of the review team to consider the flooding in Beragh, County Tyrone; and how this process is being advertised.

(AQW 4436/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I consider that a quick review is essential while the events are fresh in people's minds. That is why I have asked my Assembly Private Secretary Pat Doherty MP, MLA to undertake the investigation into the October 2011 flooding and report to me by 18 November 2011. Accordingly there was no application process and no review team appointed.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the impact of the process of Hydraulic Fracturing on the water-sports industry.

(AQW 4022/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): There is currently no consensus or agreement as to the impact of the process of hydraulic fracturing on water-sports activities generally. I understand that hydraulic fracturing is a relatively new process and, as such, its long term effects on water sport are not yet known. I am, however, aware that there is widespread concern within sport about the potential damage fracturing might cause. Sport NI, which is responsible for the development of sport in the north of Ireland, is working in partnership with local authorities to develop a number of Local Outdoor Recreation Forums, including in areas of the north where fracturing is being considered. These Forums are intended to provide a platform for the recreation community and industry generally to discuss issues of concern. Sport NI hopes that the Forums will assist sport, including water-sports, reach a clearer consensus position on the impact of hydraulic fracturing on the recreation industry as a whole and how any concerns in relation to this can best be addressed.

Mobile Libraries

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration has been given to the use of mobile libraries as a method of providing broadband access to people in rural communities.

(AQW 4024/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI will address the issue of using mobile libraries as a method of providing broadband access to people in rural communities as part of its forthcoming review of mobile library services.

Libraries NI currently has two mobile libraries equipped to provide access via satellite connectivity which works effectively in many but not all locations.

Ulster Canal

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an estimate of the potential tourist traffic to the River Bann if the Ulster Canal was completed.

(AQW 4028/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is not possible to predict accurately the number of tourists who may visit or use the River Bann (upper and lower sections) if the Ulster Canal was completed.

The "Feasibility Study – Re-opening of the Ulster Canal , June 2001" projected the annual users to be 14,000 – 15,000. This included boaters, anglers, cyclists, hikers and walkers. The "Ulster Canal Socio-economic study – March 2006" projected that as a result of a fully restored Ulster Canal, expenditure could be estimated at between £2.6m and £3.2m pa.

These estimates are for the re-opening of the complete length (45 miles) of the Ulster Canal only.

Libraries in the Strangford Constituency

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people visited each library in the Strangford constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4040/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following table shows how many people visited each library in the Strangford Constituency in each of the last five years;

Library	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Ballynahinch	25,750	28,600	27,650	32,050	37,750
Comber	37,950	36,400	28,150	23,660	26,950
Killyleagh	20,950	21,450	25,450	16,900	18,750
Newtownards	73,350	60,900	68,000	78,260	69,900
Portaferry	25,450	19,550	19,750	24,076	17,800
Saintfield	19,950	28,250	24,950	30,004	24,950

These figures were provided by Libraries NI.

Odyssey Trust Company Limited

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 3754/11-15, how her Department 'does not direct, or intervene in, the Odyssey Trust Company's schedule of planned maintenance and/or refurbishment' when the mechanisms for the OTC, set out in the 1998 funding agreement with her Department, 'provides that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure approval is required for the Company to incur expenditure on property and assets exceeding £200,000'.

(AQW 4054/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The clause to which you refer is from Schedule 8, Paragraph 3.1 of the 1998 Funding Agreement and requires Departmental approval for expenditure on the acquisition of property or assets.

Expenditure on planned maintenance or refurbishment of existing assets is not within the scope of this clause.

2012 Olympic Games Training Camp Agreements

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many 2012 Olympic Games training camp agreements have been signed to date; (ii) with whom the agreements are signed; (iii) what is the cost of these agreements to Northern Ireland; and (iv) how the cost for each will be met.

(AQW 4070/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: To date three pre games training camps for the north of Ireland have been announced. These are:-

1. The Australian Olympic boxing team;
2. The Paralympics Ireland team; and
3. The Chinese Olympic women's and men's artistic gymnastics team.

Each camp's requirements and associated costs will be different and the costs for each camp are currently being explored.

The London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG), provides an incentivisation fund of up to £25,000 to each Olympic and Paralympic Committee, to encourage them to train in approved venues in the UK.

In some cases, additional support will be required.

My Department may provide an element of funding to support the camps subject to approved business cases and funding being made available.

Sport NI in conjunction with other key partners will produce a business case for each camp requiring funding in addition to the LOCOG grant.

SNI, DCAL, local Councils, venues and other partners will work together to jointly fund pre Games training camps.

2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people from Northern Ireland will participate in the London 2012 (i) Olympic Games; and (ii) Paralympic Games.

(AQW 4081/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The number of athletes from the north of Ireland competing in the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games will not be known until all the qualification events take place. These events will take place up to May 2012.

The number of volunteers from the north of Ireland who will be participating in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games is not yet known.

The London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) confirmed that 1740 applications from the north of Ireland were received and approximately 900 applicants were offered an interview to become a volunteer during the Olympic and Paralympic Games (known as Games Makers).

LOCOG has started the process of informing successful candidates. This process will continue until April 2012. It is anticipated that 50% of those interviewed may be successful.

2012 Olympics: Talent Identification and Development

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent on talent identification and development for the 2012 Olympics; and for a breakdown of this spend.

(AQW 4083/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of exchequer and lottery funding. In the last three financial years, Sport NI has provided £782,235 towards talent identification and development within Olympic sports through its Investing in Performance Sport Programme. This figure is broken down by Olympic sport in the table below.

Sport	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Athletics	0	£28,000	£28,000	**£56,000**
Badminton	£13,600	£13,600	£13,600	**£40,800**
Canoeing	0	£6,275	£6,275	**£12,550**
Cycling	£29,606	£29,606	£29,606	**£88,818**
Equestrian	0	£18,475	£18,475	**£36,950**
Hockey	0	£62,712	£62,712	**£125,424**
Rowing	0	£33,873	£33,873	**£67,746**
Sailing	0	£34,848	£34,848	**£69,696**
Swimming	0	£20,625	£20,625	**£41,250**
Table Tennis	£13,600	£13,600	£13,600	**£40,800**
Tennis	£35,000	£35,000	£35,000	**£105,000**
Triathlon	0	£35,000	£35,000	**£70,000**

Sport	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Wrestling	0	£13,600	£13,600	**£27,200**
Total	**£91,806**	**£345,214**	**£345,214**	**£782,235**

2012 Olympic Games

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent on volunteering for the 2012 Olympics; and for a breakdown of this spend.

(AQW 4084/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under the NI Strategy for the 2012 Games Volunteer Now lead on volunteering, £210,000 has been committed to the end of March 2012.

The funding is broken down as follows:

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Award	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000	£60,000

2012 Olympics Games

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent on events training and holding camps in Northern Ireland for the 2012 Olympics; and for a breakdown of this spend.

(AQW 4086/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under the NI Strategy for the 2012 Games Sport NI lead on sports legacy including pre Games training camps and events. £250,000 has been committed to the end of March 2012.

The funding is broken down as follows:

Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Award	£65,000	£85,000	£100,000

2012 Olympics Games

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what the total cost of the Olympics Games 2012 will be to Northern Ireland; (ii) to detail the sources of funding which were available to Northern Ireland towards these costs; and (iii) to detail the amount drawn down from each source.

(AQW 4087/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL leads and facilitates the Olympic Strategy in the north through partnership arrangements and the Department has established the Games Legacy Unit to advance work to secure a local legacy from the Games with an allocation of £450k per annum by the Department. This money is not being used to deliver the London2012 Games – that is the responsibility of the Organising Committee – but is directed at ensuring programmes, projects and activities of benefit to the north area realised.

DCAL's total expenditure is expected to be in the region of £1.8m by 2012/13. DCAL provides funding to local partners to support participation and local benefits across the three NI 2012 legacy themes of sport including disability sport, community engagement and economic.

Full details of partner investments in local 2012 activity and funding leveraged from other sources will not be known or completely calculated until post Games Time. However, current sources of funding include £1.31m from Legacy Trust UK for the NI Connections Programme. In addition the London

Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) provides funding up to £25k to support international teams for pre-games training in the UK and through 2012 sponsors funding has been secured to support unique art/cultural commissions as well as major events as part of the London 2012 Festival. The 2012 Arts and Culture programme is presently estimated at a value of around £5million, secured from external sources.

Irish-language Organisations

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if, and when, she will publish the analysis of responses received to the extended consultation on the proposals for the core funded Irish Language organisations.

(AQW 4089/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) met on 12 October 2011 and reviewed progress towards the Review of Core funded bodies. The NSMC asked Foras na Gaeilge to undertake a further 12 week consultation about the portfolio of draft schemes.

The further consultation will include a full Equality Impact Assessment and also provide an opportunity for comments and alternative suggestions about the main economic impacts and benefits if the proposed schemes were implemented.

Foras na Gaeilge will publish an analysis of responses once the consultation has been completed.

Indigenous Languages Strategy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial resources she has set aside for (i) the Irish Language; and (ii) Ulster-Scots within the Indigenous Languages Strategy; and (iii) an Irish Language Act.

(AQW 4090/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In relation to the promotion of the Irish language my Department already contributes 25% of the total Foras na Gaeilge budget. This amounted to £4,593,143 in 2010.

No resources have yet been specifically allocated for either Irish Language or Ulster-Scots within an Indigenous Languages Strategy or an Irish Language Act.

European Union: Infraction Fines

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what level of infraction fines she is anticipating being levied against her Department by the Euuropean Union because of breaches of the Habitats Directive by the interception of mixed stocks of salmon by commercial nets, which have been licensed by her Department, on the North Coast of Antrim.

(AQW 4106/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is not aware of any infraction proceedings against this Department by the European Union.

DOE is the lead Department in Northern Ireland for the implementation of the Habitats Directive. DCAL seeks to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Directive and the implementing legislation in Northern Ireland through the discharge of its responsibilities in relation to the conservation and protection of salmon and inland fisheries.

Infraction proceedings by the EU in relation to breaches of the Habitats Directive will be against the UK as a Member State and not against the devolved administrations or individual Government Departments.

Lough Neagh: Illegal Netting of Fish

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the representations she has received on the issue of the illegal netting of fish on Lough Neagh; and what actions her Department is taking to address this issue.

(AQW 4107/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Between October 2008 and the current date, I and my predecessors have received the following representations on the issue of illegal fishing which includes netting of fish on Lough Neagh.

- 13 - Written Assembly Questions some of which are not exclusive to Lough Neagh but include Lough Neagh.
- 5 - correspondence cases relating to all forms of illegal fishing on Lough Neagh.
- 1 - invitation to discuss illegal fishing on Lough Neagh.

DCAL Fishery Protection Officers, under the management of Senior Fisheries Officers continue to undertake regular patrols on land and water around Lough Neagh and throughout the DCAL operational area. They also continue to undertake inspections of premises such as hotels, restaurants and commercial outlets to ensure that those businesses comply fully with the 1966 Fisheries Act and Fisheries Regulations.

DCAL will endeavour to make the best use of its own resources to protect and conserve fish populations in the DCAL operational area including Lough Neagh.

Lough Neagh: Fishing Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has considered introducing regulations to ensure the clear identification of legal fishing nets at Lough Neagh which would facilitate the confiscation of illegal nets either on shore or on the Lough.

(AQW 4108/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Regulations regarding the identification of legal fishing nets on Lough Neagh already exist and are clearly specified in the 1966 Fisheries Act and associated regulations.

Each net or row of nets of a single wall set net or trammel net used for the taking of trout and coarse fish on Lough Neagh must be marked at each end with a float not less than 30 centimetres in diameter, of a bright yellow colour projecting not less than 30 centimetres above the surface of the water.

Each float must have clearly and legibly painted or fixed in figures of not less than 12 centimetres in height, the number allocated to the licence-holder by the Department (or any number the Department has allocated to the net or row of nets of which the float shall be a mark) and at all times when the net or row of nets is in use such number must be clearly legible.

Any nets that do not comply with these requirements are illegal and, if discovered, are subject to seizure by DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers.

Lough Neagh: Fish Caught

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what arrangements are in place for the licensing of fish merchants trading in fish caught on Lough Neagh.

(AQW 4110/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Arrangements for the licensing of fish merchants are clearly defined under section 113 of the 1966 Fisheries Act and subsequent Regulations. These cover the DCAL jurisdiction which includes Lough Neagh.

Those persons selling salmon, trout (including sea trout) and eels commercially must have in their possession a fish dealers licence issued by DCAL regardless of the origin of the fish, unless it is fish which they caught. This requirement was extended in subsequent Regulations to include pollen and pike.

Fish merchants must also keep a daily register of all purchases and sales of fish. Fish merchant's premises and their registers and those suspected of selling fish can be subject to inspections by DCAL officials.

Lough Neagh: Fish Population

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the current population status of each fish species normally found in Lough Neagh; and what constitutes a sustainable population.

(AQW 4112/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has received scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) concerning the European eel. Their report concludes that the European eel stock in Lough Neagh is outside safe biological limits.

DCAL, working in conjunction with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), has undertaken research for the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO), which includes electro-fishing surveys, habitat surveys and the installation of fish counters on the Rivers Blackwater and Maine. Records conclude that salmon populations in these rivers, which flow into Lough Neagh, are failing to achieve conservation levels and are outside safe biological limits.

The status of the population of migratory trout in Lough Neagh is unknown at present but research is currently being undertaken and a report is due in 2012.

Of other fish species occurring in Lough Neagh, there is currently no data on populations of pollan, roach, rudd, bream, rudd/roach/bream hybrids, pike, perch, tench, stone loach, gudgeon, minnow and stickleback.

The term sustainable population is applied to a fishery where the populations have safe biological limits and/or reproductive capacity and can beexploited to provide a yield. A sustainable yield is within the range where the populations can maintain productivity to provide a satisfactory yield.

Library Opening Hours

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if she will copy the letters that she has received from the general public and library staff expressing concern over the proposed reduction in library opening hours to the Chief Executive of Libraries NI.

(AQW 4128/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is normal practice for my officials to forward letters or e-mails received from the general public and library staff to the Chief Executive of Libraries NI. It is important that they can be taken into consideration during the public consultation process.

Ilex Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, with regard to Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from her current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4137/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL has been working closely with Digital Derry – an initiative involving private, public and academic organisations to support the digital content sector in Derry and the North-West. Digital Derry is a crucial contributor to the "Growing the Digital Economy" catalyst programme identified by the One Plan.

In 2011/12 my Department committed £25,000 to enable Digital Derry to launch a Culture Tech seed competition in January 2012.

Digital Derry will also receive £9,500 to assist development of a "Legenderry Festival" - Ireland's first festival of digital culture incorporating film, TV, animation, games, music technology, web and mobile content and digital arts. The festival is planned to take place in 2012 and 2013.

My Department has provided £6,000 to Derry City Council in respect of the August 2011 Milwaukee Irish Fest to allow Craft workers to take part. This provided an opportunity to highlight programmes taking place in Derry in 2012 (such as the North Atlantic Fiddle Festival and Clipper round the world yacht race) which are lead in programmes to 2013 when Derry is City of Culture.

My officials are also working with the Culture Company 2013 to enable it to take a lead in promoting Creativity Month in March 2012 and 2013.

ACNI and DCAL continue to work with ILEX on proposals for 2013.

Fisheries Act 1966

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether the Fisheries Act 1966 is fit for purpose; and if not, when she will begin consultations on a replacement Bill.

(AQW 4193/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Fisheries Act, as amended, has been in place for 45 years and I am aware that some of its provisions have been superseded by more recent European Directives. I consider that the Act still provides a sound foundation for the conservation and protection of fisheries andcan address changing circumstances through the making of subordinate legislation.

A review of the Act would be resource intensive for DCAL and is not currently a priority for the Department.

Gaelic Games: Coverage on Television and Radio

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps she will take to promote fair coverage of Gaelic games on television and radio.

(AQW 4241/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Broadcasting is a reserved matter.

Responsibility for the promotion of Gaelic games, including related television and radio coverage, rests with the governing body for the sport, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

The level of television and radio coverage that Gaelic games receives is a matter for negotiation between the GAA and broadcasting companies and is not within the remit of my Department.

Ulster-Scots Community

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the support her Department has provided in the last 12 months for initiatives aimed at building relationships between the Ulster-Scots community and the Lowland-Scots community in Scotland.

(AQW 4268/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As defined in the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 the Ulster-Scots Agency has the statutory remit for the promotion of Ulster-Scots culture issues. Any project or initiative which requires financial support from the Agency is considered on its merits in line with the financial corporate governance requirements and the Agency's statutory obligations.

The Ulster-Scots Agency has not resourced any initiative in the last 12 months with the aim of building relationships between the Ulster-Scots community and the Lowland-Scots community in Scotland.

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff currently employed at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.

(AQW 4274/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are currently ninety-nine staff employed at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, of which 59 are full time, 12 are part time and the remaining 28 staff are non-contract casual staff.

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any changes to the staffing structures at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum within the last twelve months.

(AQW 4276/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The followingrecruitment has taken place at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum within the last 12 months:

a) Front of House Supervisor (1 temporary full time post filled internally).

b) Front of House Assistants (3 temporary posts filled internally and 5 temporary posts filled externally).

c) Seasonal Visitor Guides (8 temporary posts filled internally).

d) First Person Interpreter (6 temporary posts filled internally and 1 temporary post filled externally).

National Museums has advised me that the creation of the Front of House Supervisor and First Person Interpreter posts are the only changes to the museum's staffing structure in the past 12 months.

Odyssey Trust Company Limited: Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 3753/11-15, where the report commissioned by the Odyssey Trust Company's Trustees can be accessed; and if it has not yet been published, whether she will publish this report.

(AQW 4288/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The independent Remuneration Review Report referred to in AQW 3753/11-15 was commissioned by the Trustees of the Odyssey Trust Company. It is therefore their decision on whether they will release it. My Department does not hold a copy of this report.

Gaelic Games: Coverage

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will meet with the BBC to discuss the lack of coverage of Gaelic games compared to other sports.

(AQW 4310/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The level of television and radio coverage that Gaelic games receives is a matter for negotiation between the GAA and broadcasting companies and is not within the remit of my Department. Therefore, I have no plans to discuss this with the BBC

Tourism Potential of Canals

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to increase the tourism potential of canals.

(AQW 4326/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for the development of tourism lies with the Department for Trade, Enterprise and Investment and the NI Tourist Board.

DCAL manages and maintains a number of inland water recreation sites. Its role in respect of these inland waterways is to develop the recreational and navigational potential.

Among these inland waterways are the abandoned Ulster Canal and Lagan Navigation. Both would require substantial financial investment to re-open them. Work has been undertaken to investigate the potential costs of re-opening both of these canals.

Theatres and Theatre-going: Promotion

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what additional resources her Department will put in place to promote theatres and theatre going.

(AQW 4379/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not directly fund organisations. DCAL funding is mainly disbursed through its Arms Length Bodies.

The Arts Council provides core funding as well as substantial lottery funding to theatre companies for production, individual projects, new work and access to the arts. This funding is available to community drama companies, youth, amateur and professional companies. Awards totaling £2,631,156 (£2,026,933 Exchequer funding and £604,223 Lottery funding) were made in the current financial year. In addition, both the Northern Ireland Theatre Association and Ulster Youth Drama Association received funding (total £89,510, of which £34,650 is Exchequer).

The Arts Council along with the Arts Councils of England, Scotland and Wales, contributes to a central "UK Cross Border Touring Fund" which enables the touring companies to tour outside their regions. As a result larger venues in the north of Ireland have hosted performances by large –scale companies. In 2011/12 the Arts Council contributed £220,000 to this fund.

There are currently no plans to further increase resources to promote theatres and theatre going.

Sport Matters Capital and Equipment Awards Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she intends to make the Sport Matters Capital and Equipment Awards Programme available next year.

(AQW 4388/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department's capital budget for 2011/2015 is fully committed to the specific programmes for which it was allocated by the Executive. This allocation does not include funding for the Sport Matters Capital and Equipment Programme. Therefore, there is no scope to make this programme available in the current CSR period.

Sharing of Sports Facilities in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to encourage the sharing of sports facilities between local councils and the Department of Education in the North Down area.

(AQW 4398/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for promoting the sharing of sports facilities between local councils and the Department of Education (DE) in the North Down constituency is a matter for the councils concerned and the individual school management authorities.

The embedding of a strategic and co-ordinated approach to the provision of education and district council sports facilities throughout the north of Ireland, including in the North Down constituency, is identified as one of a number of 'Key Steps to Success' under the published sports strategy, Sport Matters. This step has recently been incorporated into a detailed Sport Matters Action Plan which has been agreed by local councils, including those in the North Down constituency, and DE.

As part of this Action Plan, Sport NI, with DE support, is also developing an advocacy document which is designed to promote shared use of school sports facilities in all areas and all constituencies in the north of Ireland. The Sport Matters Monitoring Group (SMMG), which I chair, has recently agreed that local councils, including those in the North Down constituency, should be consulted on the document's development prior to its wider publication and circulation.

Arts Council's Annual Support for Organisations Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support organisations in the North Antrim area have received in the last three years from the Arts Council's Annual Support for Organisations Programme.

(AQW 4417/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There have been no organisations from the North Antrim Constituency which have received funding from the Arts Council's Annual Support for Organisations Programme in the last 3 years. However, a total of £197,285 has been awarded to the constituency since 2009/10 through a variety of other funding programmes including Public Art, Lottery Project Funding, Small Grants programme and the Musical Instruments for Bands programme.

All-Ireland Soccer Team

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to meet with the Irish Football Association and the Football Association of Ireland to discuss the establishment of an all-Ireland soccer team.

(AQW 4476/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have no plans, at present, to meet with the Irish Football Association (IFA) or the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) to discuss the establishment of an all-Ireland soccer team. The establishment of such a team is not a matter for me but wholly a matter for the two governing bodies together with FIFA. Both the IFA and the FAI are, however, aware of my personal views on this matter and my belief that there would be real benefits for football in having an all-Ireland soccer team.

Arts Sector: Funding

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the funding her Department has earmarked for the arts sector in each Belfast constituency in the 2011-15 budgetary period.

(AQW 4502/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department's funding in support of the arts is disbursed by the Arts Council through a number of funding programmes. This funding is not allocated on the basis of constituency but on the merits of the application to the relevant funding programme.

It is not possible to provide details of future funding in each Belfast constituency, but the current Arts Council budget figure for 2011/12, and the indicative allocations to the Arts Council for each subsequent year of the Budget period are as follows:

	11/12	**12/13**	**13/14**	**14/15**
	£m	**£m**	**£m**	**£m**
Total resource budget	14.4	13.2	12.8	12.9
Total Capital Budget	3.8	0.6	0.5	0.5

NB. Above figures exclude the Creative Industries Innovation Fund allocation.

Gaelic Football Match between Carrickmore and Dromore: Violence

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the on and off pitch violence at the recent gaelic football match between Carrickmore and Dromore, and the message that it sent out to children and young people; and whether either of the clubs involved have received funding from her Department in the last four years.

(AQW 4507/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have already publicly stated that I totally condemn acts of violence and disorder at any sporting event in the north of Ireland, including GAA games. I believe the behaviour demonstrated by some of the players and a small number of spectators at the match between Carrickmore and Dromore does nothing to promote the good name of Gaelic games and sport in general and sets a very poor example to children and young people. I understand that Tyrone GAA has already launched an investigation into the matter and I trust that appropriate disciplinary sanctions will be taken against those found to be responsible. In my view, Tyrone GAA's prompt response and the sanctions imposed by the GAA in the past send out a very clear message to children and young people about what is regarded as acceptable behaviour at GAA events. I also believe that the strong stance the Association traditionally takes in such cases, sets a good example for other sports where on or off pitch violence or disorder has occurred.

Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of funding. In the last four financial years, Sport NI has awarded £232,310 to Dromore St Dympna GFC as detailed below:

Date	Project	Award
27/5/09	2nd training pitch with floodlighting and fencing	£230,000
11/2/10	Under 6 Nursery Programme	£2,310
Total		**£232,310**

Library Provision in Gilford, County Down

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's role in delivering future library provision in Gilford, County Down.

(AQW 4515/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Board and Senior Management Team of Libraries NI are responsible for the delivery of future library provision in Gilford.

Libraries NI has assured me that it will work in partnership with Banbridge District Council and the Gilford Community Development Group to provide library services from the new Community Centre. The exact nature of this provision is subject to ongoing discussions between Libraries NI, the Community group and the Council.

Library Provision in Gilford, County Down

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she will prioritise the social, economic and cultural development of Gilford, County Down when she is considering the library provision for the village from March 2012.

(AQW 4516/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Board and Senior Management Team of Libraries NI are responsible for the delivery of future library provision in Gilford.

I have put the onus on Libraries NI to work locally to ensure that the library services available to the community of Gilford are adequate, remain sustainable and contribute fully to the social, economic and cultural needs of the community.

It is my understanding that Libraries NI will develop an action plan for the implementation of closures of each Library, including Gilford, to be published on its website.

Community Festivals Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 4147/11-15, why the North Down area has received only £4000 from the Community Festivals Fund in each of the last two years.

(AQW 4532/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: One of the requirements of the Community Festivals fund is that the councils must provide match funding.

North Down Borough Council accepted £18,600 in 2008/2009 but asked for an allocation of £4,000 in the following two years, due to the amount of match funding available in the council.

Gaelic Football Match between Carrickmore and Dromore: Violence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of (i) the on and off pitch violence at the recent gaelic football match between Carrickmore and Dromore and its impact on Gaelic games and sport in general; and (ii) the call from the Tyrone County Board for the culprits to own up.

(AQW 4594/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have already publicly stated that I totally condemn acts of violence and disorder at any sporting event in the north of Ireland, including GAA games. I believe the behaviour demonstrated by some of the players and a small number of spectators at the match between Carrickmore and Dromore does nothing to promote the good name of Gaelic games and sport in general. Responsibility for taking action following such incidents is a matter for the GAA. I understand that the Tyrone County Board has already launched an investigation into the matter and that, in addition to studying video footage and photographs of the incident, it has called on those involved to come forward and accept responsibility for their actions.

I would fully support any action the GAA takes that will ultimately identify those responsible and lead to appropriate disciplinary sanctions being applied.

Líofa 2015

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the uptake of Líofa 2015 since it was launched.

(AQO 773/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: 733 people have signed up to the Líofa 2015 campaign to date.

Libraries: Rural Areas

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if her Department will encourage Libraries NI to work pro-actively with rural communities to help make local libraries more sustainable.

(AQO 774/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As the member will be aware the Libraries NI Board has decided that a number of rural libraries may not be sustainable without the action of other organisations. I have asked Libraries NI to develop an action plan for each library to set out how they will work with local partners to ensure that these libraries become sustainable. The action plan will be published on the Libraries NI website.

The closure of any public library, or reduction in opening hours, is of great concern to me. I am acutely aware of the potential impact that such actions can have on a local community.

In rural areas there is an onus on public sector organisations to work together and with community associations to ensure continued access to public services.

DCAL: Spending Controls

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures she intends to take to ensure that her Department will not breach spending controls again.

(AQO 775/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The member is referring to qualifications to my Department's accounts for the 2010/11 year where there was expenditure in excess of Estimates cover.

Although the breach in spending controls was very regrettable, it arose from the somewhat technical issue of asset revaluations and did not involve a cash overspend. Nor did it affect the ability of my Department to continue its normal operations.

Having said that, I am, of course, very mindful of the need to comply with Assembly controls over expenditure and can report that internal processes have been changed to ensure such a breach does not happen again.

My Department will also seek Assembly approval for the excess expenditure in the next Budget Order.

Public Library Standards

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the timetable for the completion of the review into the existing Public Library Standards.

(AQO 776/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Public Library Standards form part of DCAL's policy framework for the public library service entitled 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries'. This policy was published in July 2006.

The Policy is still relevant to the continued development and monitoring of public library services. However, Libraries NI is faced with working within very tight budget allocations and some of the aspirational targets within 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries' are currently unaffordable during this time of austerity. It may be necessary to modify expectations to live within budgets.

My officials continue to keep the Library Standards under review and will initiate a review of the Standards in 2012.

Sport: Participation

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what actions she is taking to increase participation in sports.

(AQO 777/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The sports strategy, Sport Matters, sets out a number of targets to be achieved over the next 10 years that are specifically designed to increase participation in sports across the population. In order to ensure these targets are delivered, a DCAL led Sport Matters Monitoring Group, chaired by me, has been established to oversee the implementation of Sport Matters including its sports participation elements. This group is made up of senior representatives of DCAL, DHSSPS, DE, DSD, DARD, DEL, the Environment Agency, SportNI, district councils and sports governing bodies.

The Monitoring Group recently approved a Sport Matters Action Plan setting out detailed actions that are now being taken to ensure that all of the targets set out in Sport Matters, including those relating to increasing sports participation, are achieved within the life of the strategy. This Action Plan was developed and agreed by key partners and sports stakeholders represented on SportNI led Sport Matters

Implementation Groups. These Implementation Groups report to my Monitoring Group and I monitor progress on the Action Plan via that mechanism.

In the meantime, SportNI, which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding, is continuing to invest in programmes that are designed to help deliver the sports participation targets set out in Sport Matters. A total of £24.6m of exchequer and lottery funding has already been invested by SportNI in these programmes since Sport Matters was approved by the Executive in 2009.

The latest Continuous Household Survey data, for example, indicates that there has been an increase in adult participation rates over the past year - recovering from 46% in 2009/10 to 50% in 2010/11.

Museums Policy

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the implementation of the Museums Policy which was launched on 9 March 2011.

(AQO 778/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Immediately following the launch of the Museums Policy, in April 2011 an Implementation Working Group was established which comprises representatives from National Museums, the NI Museums Council and my Department.

This Group is tasked with working through the issues around the implementation of the Policy and agreeing an effective implementation strategy that can be meaningfully delivered by the museums sector.

We are now approaching the start of the business planning cycle for 2012-13. I will ensure that National Museums and the NI Museums Council incorporate detailed plans to implement the Museums Policy within their published business plans for 2012-13.

This group continues to meet formally on a monthly basis.

World Pipe Band Championships

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if her Department will do everything in its power to encourage the World Pipe Band Championships to come to Belfast in the future.

(AQO 779/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Belfast City Council (BCC) has been given the opportunity to bid for Northern Ireland to host the World Pipe Band Championships 2013 – 2015.

My Department is fully supportive of Belfast's bid to host the Championships and has written to encourage the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association to make Belfast the host city for the Championships.

My Department will continue to support the City Council in its bid to achieve a positive outcome.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when an announcment will be made about the venues selected to host events for the 2013 World Police and Fire Games.

(AQO 780/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Between 2 July 2010 and 29 July 2010 Sport NI completed an 'expression of interest' exercise (on behalf of the Stakeholder Group - the lead body prior to the formal establishment of 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited on 28 February 2011) to identify potential venues to host the sports events for the 2013 Games.

The Board of Directors of 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited approved a list of 35 provisional venues that met the minimum standards to host approximately 67 sports.

The Company is now engaging in pre-contract negotiations with the shortlisted venues prior to the Board making final decisions. The negotiations are without prejudice. Venues are expected to be confirmed in Summer 2012 when that process is complete.

Arts in the North Down Constituency

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has invested in the arts in the North Down constituency in each of the last five years; and where this funding was applied.

(AQW 4627/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not directly provide funding for the arts, as funding is disbursed through the Arts Council. For information on arts funding in the North Down constituency, you should contact the Arts Council directly.

DCAL does allocate Community Festivals funding to the local councils, but does not hold information at constituency level.

If you require a breakdown of arts related Community Festivals Funding in the North Down constituency, you should contact the relevant council directly.

Department of Education

Líofa 2015

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2220/11-15, given his intention 'to support Líofa 2015 in whatever ways might be possible through the education system', to detail (i) the "traditional misconceptions about Irish language and culture being the preserve of one section of our community'; (ii) what analysis the Department has carried out in relation to this matter; (iii) upon what have such misconceptions been based; and (iv) in what way he intends to use support for Liofa 2015 to address this issue.

(AQW 3719/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Policy on Irish language and culture is a matter for my ministerial colleague, Caral ni Chuilin, in DCAL and I share the Culture Minister's view that Liofa 2015 is an initiative aimed at broadening the appeal of the Irish Language. As far as support for Liofa from the education system is concerned there is a role for Irish Medium education (IME) to contribute to the development of the Irish language. Non Irish Medium education schools can play a role in this also. However the promotion of IME must take place in the context of schools delivering a high quality education.

Líofa 2015

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2221/11-15, (i) to explain why he did not state whether he has carried out any analysis on the prevalence of the view, of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, that some people have sought to portray the promotion of Gaelic culture and the Irish Language as the preserve of one section of our community; and (ii) whether he has carried out any such analysis.

(AQW 3722/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Policy on Irish language and culture is a matter for my ministerial colleague, Caral ni Chuilin, in DCAL and I share the Culture Minister's view that Liofa 2015 is an initiative aimed at broadening the appeal of the Irish Language. As far as support for Liofa from the education system is concerned there is a role for Irish Medium education (IME) to contribute to the development of the Irish language. Non Irish Medium education schools can play a role in this also. However the promotion of IME must take place in the context of schools delivering a high quality education.

School Property: Value

Mr McNarry asked Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2901/11-15, AQW 2941/11-15 and AQW 3001/11-15 and, in relation to the information provided on the controlled estate, to detail the name of each school, broken down by (i) Education and Library Board area; and (ii) the value of each school property (a) in use; and (b) not in use.

(AQW 3963/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information on the controlled estate broken down by (i) Education and Library Board and (ii) the value of each school property (a) in use; and (b) not in use has been placed in the Assembly Library.

It should be noted that the valuation figures being supplied for the South Eastern Education and Library differ slightly from those in the response dated (13 October 2011) due to a portion of one property now being reported as being 'not in use'.

Pupils Attending Grammar and Non-grammar Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of pupils currently attending (i) grammar schools; and (ii) non-grammar schools who live in the wards (a) Academy; (b) Ardeevin; (c) Ballyloughan; (d) Dunclug; (e) Fair Green; (f) Galgorm; (g) Park; (h) Balee; (i) Ballykeel; (j) Castle Demesne; (k) Harryville; (l) Kells; (m) Moat; and (n) Summerfield.

(AQW 4052/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

PERCENTAGE OF POST-PRIMARY PUPILS RESIDENT IN SELECTED WARDS ATTENDING GRAMMAR/ NON-GRAMMAR SCHOOLS, 2010/11

Ward Name	% attending Grammar schools	% attending Non- Grammar schools
Academy	72.5	27.5
Ardeevin	57.4	42.6
Ballyloughan	65.3	34.7
Dunclug	19.2	80.8
Fair Green	16.4	83.6
Galgorm	71.2	28.8
Park	43.3	56.7
Ballee	13.9	86.1
Ballykeel	19.2	80.8
Castle Demesne	22.0	78.0
Harryville	41.7	58.3
Kells	53.4	46.6
Moat	19.3	80.7
Summerfield	39.7	60.3

Source: NI school census.

Pupils Attending Grammar and Non-grammar Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of pupils currently attending (i) grammar schools; and (ii) non-grammar schools who live in the wards (a) Ahoghill; (b) Cullybackey; (c) Dunminning; (d) Grange; (e) Portglenone; (f) Broughshane; (g) Craigwarren; (h) Glenravel; (i) Glenwhirry; and (j) Slemish.

(AQW 4053/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

PERCENTAGE OF POST-PRIMARY PUPILS RESIDENT IN SELECTED WARDS ATTENDING GRAMMAR/ NON-GRAMMAR SCHOOLS, 2010/11

Ward Name	% attending Grammar schools	% attending Non- Grammar schools
Ahoghill	57.5	42.5
Cullybackey	38.7	61.3
Dunminning	51.4	48.6
Grange	52.8	47.2
Portglenone	49.0	51.0
Broughshane	59.1	40.9
Craigywarren	61.9	38.1
Glenravel	37.4	62.6
Glenwhirry	66.5	33.5
Slemish	58.1	41.9

Source: NI school census

Central Primary School, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether his Department or the South Eastern Education and Library Board have agreed funding for a new build for Central Primary School, Bangor.

(AQW 4055/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would confirm that neither the Department nor the South Eastern Education and Library Board has agreed funding for a new build for Bangor Central Primary School.

As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process based on Board areas to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Schools previously identified as needing a new build, including that for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School (IPS), will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed and may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. Future capital investment will be targeted at supporting area plans.

Schools: Viability Audit Process

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education whether the viability audit process for schools has been rural proofed by his Department; and if so, to detail the issues identified.

(AQW 4068/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sustainable Schools Policy is the Department's framework for assessing the viability and long term sustainability of schools across the North. The policy addresses the issue of rural schools and it was rural–proofed before publication in 2009. The viability audit draws on the relevant indicators set out in the Sustainable Schools Policy and applies these to all primary and post-primary schools, with the main focus being on enrolments, quality of education and financial stability.

Since commissioning the viability audit I have not had any formal discussions with my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development as the views of her Department are encompassed in the Sustainable Schools Policy and will therefore be reflected in the audit.

Schools: Viability Audit Process

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education whether he has had any discussions with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development about the potential impact of the viability audit for schools on the survival of rural communities.

(AQW 4069/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sustainable Schools Policy is the Department's framework for assessing the viability and long term sustainability of schools across the North. The policy addresses the issue of rural schools and it was rural–proofed before publication in 2009. The viability audit draws on the relevant indicators set out in the Sustainable Schools Policy and applies these to all primary and post-primary schools, with the main focus being on enrolments, quality of education and financial stability.

Since commissioning the viability audit I have not had any formal discussions with my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development as the views of her Department are encompassed in the Sustainable Schools Policy and will therefore be reflected in the audit.

Transfer 2011 Application Forms

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education how many of the application forms for Transfer 2011 received by his Department and the Education and Library Boards were completed in Irish.

(AQW 4073/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The admissions procedures for transfer from primary to post-primary education are administered by the Education and Library Boards, therefore, no transfer forms are received by the Department of Education. The Education and Library Boards have advised that 21,035 transfer forms were received for Transfer 2011, 20 of which were completed in Irish.

Transfer 2011 Application Forms

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education how many application forms, in total, for Transfer 2011 were received by his Department and the Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 4074/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The admissions procedures for transfer from primary to post-primary education are administered by the Education and Library Boards, therefore, no transfer forms are received by the Department of Education. The Education and Library Boards have advised that 21,035 transfer forms were received for Transfer 2011, 20 of which were completed in Irish.

Transporting Pupils Between Schools: Cost

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of transporting pupils between schools in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) mode of transport; and (ii) areas of partnership.

(AQW 4097/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold the information requested.

The current Entitlement Framework (EF) support funding is allocated to schools on the presumption that there may be additional costs associated with planning and delivering an expanded curricular offer through collaboration. The EF support funding formula includes an urban/rural weighting in recognition of the fact that rural schools are more likely to incur greater transport costs than urban schools.

I have made it clear that while schools will of course be able to continue to collaborate with one another, collaboration is not an end in itself. Schools should be planning on the basis that pupils, particularly between the ages of 14-16, should be able to access most of their curriculum within their own school, thus avoiding unnecessary and disruptive travel.

Entitlement Framework

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the rationale used to set the minimum number of courses at 24 for Key Stage 4 and 27 at post-16 in the Entitlement Framework.

(AQW 4099/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The policy of the Entitlement Framework originated from the Costello report on future post-primary arrangements in Northern Ireland which found inconsistency in the number of Key stage 4 and Post-16 courses available to pupils depending on the size, type and location of school attended. The Report recommended that Key Stage 4 pupils should have access to a menu of courses with a minimum of 24 courses of which at least one-third must be general and at least one-third applied. The range of options available to all post-16 pupils should be greater than those at Key Stage 4 (ie) a minimum of 27 courses of which at least one-third must be general and at least one-third must be applied. The numbers remain important as a measure of what constitutes a broad and balanced curricular offer. They are an indicator, but only that and represent a challenging target for schools to provide the benefits of the Entitlement Framework for all pupils.

Teachers on Medical Suspension

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education (i) how many teachers were placed on medical suspension in each of the last three years, broken down by Education and Library Board area; and (ii) of these, how many (a) returned to their post; (b) were redeployed; (c) retired on an incapacity pension; and (d) were dismissed.

(AQW 4105/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold this information and therefore contacted the five Education and Library Boards and CCMS to provide the information which is detailed in the table below. A breakdown by board area is not appropriate due to the small numbers involved and the sensitive nature of the data.

All Board Areas	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Teachers on medical suspension	16	18	20
Returned to post	13	14	13
Redeployed	0	0	0
Retired on Incapacity Pension	1	2	1
Dismissed	0	0	0

All Board Areas	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Total	**30**	**34**	**34**

Newbuilds for Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether he will consider all options to increase the number of new builds for schools, including public private partnerships.

(AQW 4164/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Proposals for new capital builds will in the main be determined by the outcome of the work on strategic area planning that I have commissioned with the Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with CCMS and other school sectors. Moving forward, school building projects will be considered in the context of the wider area.

Costs of new school builds will be managed within the existing Budget 2010 capital budget allocations with further bids for capital made as funding requirements are confirmed.

Options for the financing of capital builds is considered as part of the Business Case process, including conventional and private finance, in line with NIGEAE guidance to ensure best value for money.

School Buildings

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many school buildings are owned by a third party; and of these, how many are currently vacant.

(AQW 4179/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At present there are approximately 626 schools in third party ownership that receive funding from the Department. When a school owned by a third party is closed, the Department is not necessarily made aware of the subsequent use of the vacated buildings. For example, they may be used by the local community or demolished for reasons of health and safety (providing no listed building grading is applicable).

Over the last 5 years, the following schools in third party ownership have closed or been subject to an amalgamation with one or more other schools:

School	Date of Closure	ELB area	Type	Management
Gaelscoil an Damba, Belfast	31/08/08	BELB	Primary	Irish Medium
St Gabriels College, Belfast	31/08/08	BELB	Secondary	Maintained
Bloomfield Collegiate School Prep Dept, Belfast	31/08/11	BELB	Preparatory	Voluntary
St Joseph's High School, Plumbridge	31/08/07	WELB	Secondary	Maintained
St Columba's PS, Curley, Dromore	31/08/09	WELB	Primary	Maintained
St Patrick's PS Garvallagh, Seskinore	31/08/09	WELB	Primary	Maintained
St Patrick's PS, Creggan	31/08/10	WELB	Primary	Maintained
St Mary's PS, Aghadowey	31/08/06	NEELB	Primary	Maintained
Braid PS, Broughshane	31/08/11	NEELB	Primary	Maintained

School	Date of Closure	ELB area	Type	Management
Lourdes PS, Whitehead	31/08/11	NEELB	Primary	Maintained
St Mary's PS, Ballygowan	31/08/07	SEELB	Primary	Maintained
Guiness Primary School, Ballynahinch	31/08/08	SEELB	Primary	Maintained
St Colman's PS, Moira	31/03/09	SEELB	Primary	Maintained
Connor House Prep Dept, Bangor Grammar School	31/08/11	SEELB	Preparatory	Voluntary
All Saints PS, Ballela, Banbridge	31/08/06	SELB	Primary	Maintained
Armagh Integrated College	31/08/09	SELB	Secondary	GMI
St Colmcille's PS, Armagh	31/08/09	SELB	Primary	Maintained
St John's PS, Glenn, Newry	31/08/10	SELB	Primary	Maintained
St John the Baptist Girls PS and St John the Baptist Boys PS amalgamated and re-opened as St John the Baptist PS on both of the former school sites.	28/02/11	BELB	Primary	Maintained
St Malachy's HS, Antrim & St Olcan's HS, Randalstown amalgamated and reopened as St Benedict's College on the St Olcan's site.	31/08/06	NEELB	Secondary	Maintained
St Louis PS, St Joseph's PS, St Mary's PS & All Saints PS, Ballymena amalgamated and reopened as St Brigid's PS & St Colmcille's PS on the St Louis's and All Saints PS sites.	31/08/07	NEELB	Primary	Maintained
St Joseph's PS & St Patrick's PS, Ahoghill amalgamated and reopened as St Paul's PS on the St Joseph's site.	01/04/08	NEELB	Primary	Maintained
St MacNissi's College St Comgall's HS & St Aloysius HS amalgamated and reopened as St Killians College on the St MacNissi's site.	29/03/10	NEELB	Secondary	Maintained

School Closures Following Amalgamation (Cont)	Date of Closure	ELB area	Type	Management
St Patrick's Boys PS & Convent of Mercy PS, D'patrick amalgamated and reopened as Our Lady and St Patrick's PS on the Convent of Mercy site.	31/08/11	SEELB	Primary	Maintained
Convent of Mercy PS & St Mary's Boys PS amalgamated and reopened as St Bronagh's PS on the Convent of Mercy PS site.	31/08/06	SELB	Primary	Maintained
St James' PS, Tandragee & St Joseph's PS, Pontzpass amalgamated and reopened as St Joseph's and St James' PS on St Joseph's PS, site.	31/08/07	SELB	Primary	Maintained

In-year Budgetary Position

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's in-year budgetary position.

(AQW 4219/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Budget 2011-15 outcome for education has produced major challenges and it is clear that difficult choices will have to be made. For 2011/12 the Department's Savings Delivery Plan details that it must make savings of £101m to balance its resource budget. I have already made clear that I will do all that I can to bear down on unnecessary bureaucracy and administration and to protect frontline services. However, the scale of these savings has meant that the Aggregated Schools Budget will be impacted. The ELBs and other arms length bodies have significant savings requirements to achieve and the Department continues to carefully monitor their delivery. I am expecting Funding Authorities to, in turn, monitor schools budgets closely. In October Monitoring the Department received valuable resources to address the considerable maintenance backlog across the schools estate. In terms of capital we are once again working within a much smaller allocation, within which we are tackling a backlog of work and prioritising minor works. I expect full spend on both resource and capital by the year end.

Teachers: Suspensions

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of teachers currently suspended from (a) primary schools; and (b) post-primary schools; and (ii) the total cost of the teachers' salaries.

(AQW 4220/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At 8 November 2011, there are 9 teachers currently suspended in primary and post primary schools. A breakdown into sectors is not appropriate due to the small numbers involved and the sensitive nature of the data. The total cost of the teachers' salaries to 31 October 2011 is £406,190.38 gross.

Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College: Land

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether the South Eastern Education and Library Board owns the land on which the Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College is situated.

(AQW 4230/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board own the land on which Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College is situated. The new school was procured by way of a Public Private Partnership.

For the duration of the PPP contract, use of the site is subject to the Project Agreement made between the SEELB and Bangor & Nendrum School Services Limited.

Primary 1 Pupils: Free School Meals

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in P1 are entitled to free school meals.

(AQW 4272/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There were 5,418 (24.0%) year 1 pupils in primary schools entitled to free school meals at the time of the 2010/11 school census. Figures for 2011/12 are currently being collected from schools and provisional figures should be available in December 2011.

St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 3726/11-15, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) the total level of funding allocated to St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge; (ii) the level and percentage of the funding which was not spent; and (iii) the level of underspend which was accumulated as moderate savings.

(AQW 4295/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The total funding allocation (and expenditure) to St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge (DE Reference 503-6043) and the underspend (and overspend) amount and percentage at year-end, for each of the last five years, are shown below.

Year	Delegated Resources £	Non-Delegated Resources £	Total Resources £	Surplus/ Deficit of Delegated Resources carryover at year-end £	Surplus/ Deficit at year-end as a percentage of available delegated resources
2006/07	1,041,395	336,320	1,377,715	53,345	5.12%
2007/08	1,053,451	387,591	1,441,042	38,993	3.70%
2008/09	1,063,169	446,021	1,509,190	26,087	2.45%
2009/10	1,065,942	498,872	1,564,814	-9,374	-0.88%
2010/11	1,078,326	502,951	1,581,277	-35,799	-3.32%

The Department's definition of an acceptable level of school budget surplus is that it must not exceed 5% or £75,000, whichever is the lesser, of the school's delegated budget. It is also acceptable to carry forward a surplus in excess of this, if it is being accumulated for specific approved purposes, and these are detailed in the three-year plan which a school agrees with its Education and Library Board.

A school may also carry-forward a deficit (overspend), as is the case in the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years, where permission has been given by the appropriate Education and Library Board. Any overspend will be subject to an upper limit of 5% or £75,000, whichever is the lesser, of a school budget share

Schools Estate

Mr McNarry asked Minister of Education to detail (i) the total value of the Schools Estate in the (a) integrated; and (b) Irish-Medium sector; and (ii) the value of each school property (a) in use; and (b) not in use.

(AQW 4375/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer you to my response to AQW 2901/11-15 where I stated that it was not possible (within the timeframe or within reasonable cost) to secure the information requested for the Grant Maintained Integrated and Irish Medium sectors as it would have to be sourced from individual schools.

Information has already been provided with regard to valuation of the individual Controlled Integrated schools in my response to AQW 3963/11-15.

The next formal valuation of the education estate is scheduled for 2012/13.

Department for Employment and Learning

External Teaching Bodies

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what external teaching bodies receive funding from his Department.

(AQW 3972/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): In addition to the Department providing funding to the local universities, university colleges and colleges of further education, 14 of the contracts for the delivery of the Training for Success and Apprenticeships NI training programmes are with organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

My Department's Steps to Work programme is delivered by 9 Lead Contractors across ten Contract Management Areas throughout Northern Ireland. Three of the Lead Contractors (covering four contract areas) are from the voluntary and community sector, and all nine have extensive subcontracting arrangements with organisations within the voluntary and community sector.

The NI European Social Fund Programme 2007-2009 funds 81 projects throughout Northern Ireland under Priority 1, mainly from the community and voluntary sector.

St Mary's University College's Board of Governors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people sit on St Mary's University College's Board of Governors; and how many of these are members of the clergy.

(AQW 4236/11-15)

Dr Farry: Eighteen members sit on the Board of Governors of St Mary's University College. Three of these are members of the clergy.

Step Ahead Programme: Applications

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the error by the North West Regional College on applications for the Step Ahead programme, whether he will now accept applications from voluntary groups in the Derry area which have been refused funding on the basis of this error, given that these groups submitted their applications within the timeframe and with all the completed documentation.

(AQW 4549/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is regrettable that it has been necessary to introduce a pause on recruitment to the Step Ahead strand of the Steps to Work (StW) programme due to budgetary pressures on my Department.

Applications for Step Ahead vacancies closed on Friday 21 October. However, due to a combination of an administrative error and IT problems, the vacancies referred to by the Member were not registered by North West Regional College before the closing date.

As the Department must be even-handed and consistent in its application of the closing date across all of our Lead Contractors, I cannot agree to accept any late applications.

Should additional resources become available later this year, I would intend to restart recruitment to Step Ahead, though this may be on a more selective and targeted basis.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Investment and Jobs Created in Each Council Area

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the level of investment by her Department in each council area; and (ii) the number of jobs created in each council area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3933/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Table 1 below shows the (i) the level of investment, or assistance offered, by Invest NI and (ii) the number of jobs expected to be created, which are described as 'Jobs Promoted', by Invest NI clients that had an offer of assistance approved between 1st April 2006 and 31st March 2011, broken down by District Council area and financial year. This represents the total amount of assistance that investors have been offered and the number of jobs that they plan to create over the lifetime of assisted projects.

The assistance offered has been further broken down to show the amount that relates to employment-related projects and business development projects. Business development offers include activities such as R&D, training and trade development, and although not directly related to job creation, will underpin business competitiveness leading eventually to growth and employment opportunities.

However, it should be noted that Government grant support is offered at the start of a project based on a company commitment to create jobs. Based on these financial commitments, the company will then contract with Invest NI to create an agreed quantity of jobs, which will be delivered over an agreed period of time and some may stretch for as long as five years. If the company cannot fully deliver their commitments then all the assistance offered may not be paid.

It should also be noted that Invest NI does not allocate budgets by geographic areas such as District Councils. The geographic location of projects is determined by those businesses which bring forward projects suitable for Invest NI assistance and are based on their specific requirements.

TABLE 1: INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED AND JOBS PROMOTED IN EACH DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA (1ST APRIL 2006 TO 31ST MARCH 2011)

	2006-07			2007-08			2008-09			2009-10			2010-11		
	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development
District Council Area	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)
Antrim	0.26	39	0.33	0.63	63	2.21	2.43	167	3.79	1.61	109	1.46	5.87	656	4.98
Ards	0.99	60	0.36	0.08	11	0.38	0.38	65	0.61	2.08	123	0.57	0.25	22	0.36
Armagh	3.11	402	0.83	0.58	84	0.57	0.67	80	1.08	0.63	74	1.00	0.17	40	0.81
Ballymena	2.38	232	1.03	3.04	56	0.40	1.03	151	0.84	1.97	33	3.62	5.40	50	0.52
Ballymoney	0.05	10	0.34	0.13	5	0.29	0.08	24	0.10	0.15	9	0.36	0.12	43	0.07
Banbridge	0.08	21	0.25	0.23	19	0.47	0.07	7	0.55	0.33	31	0.57	0.09	12	0.28
Belfast	19.49	1,723	16.37	17.08	931	19.20	27.70	1,547	25.37	24.02	1,370	34.53	17.77	1,624	27.26
Carrickfergus	0.07	23	0.07	0.06	13	0.11	0.14	22	0.19	0.30	29	0.47	3.90	203	0.20
Castlereagh	0.17	28	0.24	1.60	103	1.56	1.08	99	1.01	1.23	71	4.25	0.41	78	0.33
Coleraine	0.29	35	0.34	2.96	380	1.36	0.59	42	0.80	0.47	46	1.42	0.26	31	0.95
Cookstown	0.60	143	0.60	0.90	130	1.46	0.83	102	1.49	5.04	100	1.47	0.44	65	1.05
Craigavon	1.26	132	3.72	1.05	94	2.24	13.39	269	1.69	12.66	705	6.00	1.17	116	4.93

District Council Area	2006-07			2007-08			2008-09			2009-10			2010-11		
	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development
	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)
Derry	6.93	875	1.55	10.20	994	1.60	1.97	217	1.86	15.09	287	3.22	1.70	370	0.94
Down	0.19	39	0.12	0.28	64	0.55	0.32	73	0.22	0.49	56	0.66	0.24	59	0.33
Dungannon	1.03	233	1.45	6.57	213	2.03	2.28	245	3.73	1.51	148	4.70	1.08	164	1.83
Fermanagh	5.32	538	0.54	1.77	191	0.92	2.08	189	0.92	1.17	60	0.88	0.33	64	0.62
Larne	0.29	23	0.25	1.67	263	1.83	3.82	18	0.83	0.09	12	1.55	0.10	19	0.13
Limavady	0.14	21	0.89	0.09	9	0.35	0.08	16	0.83	0.16	5	10.19	0.19	27	0.08
Lisburn	1.51	202	2.60	1.12	130	2.45	1.05	114	2.27	2.54	196	7.06	3.90	267	1.38
Magherafelt	0.35	78	0.53	1.62	114	0.74	1.50	217	0.89	1.15	70	1.91	0.71	82	0.97
Moyle	0.12	27	0.02	0.28	37	0.04	0.51	16	0.06	0.03	8	0.04	0.11	14	0.01
Newry & Mourne	0.38	89	0.45	5.24	377	1.00	13.82	1,409	2.80	3.46	156	3.86	5.90	637	0.58
Newtownabbey	1.51	2	9.02	0.18	13	2.12	0.40	42	2.36	2.16	122	5.14	0.23	36	1.29
North Down	1.06	252	0.27	0.41	59	1.37	0.78	91	1.19	0.99	171	1.71	0.26	22	0.22
Omagh	0.27	43	0.40	1.38	134	1.17	0.80	36	0.80	0.59	35	0.88	0.30	61	0.31

District Council Area	2006-07			2007-08			2008-09			2009-10			2010-11		
	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development	Job-Related		Business Development
	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)	Total Assistance (£m)	New Jobs	Total Assistance (£m)
Strabane	0.53	73	0.40	0.33	65	0.32	0.31	35	0.32	0.67	71	1.28	0.09	9	0.13
Not Yet Located										0.24	20	0.03	6.27	545	0.00
Total	**48.40**	**5,343**	**45.50**	**59.50**	**4,552**	**51.45**	**78.11**	**5,293**	**62.66**	**80.85**	**4,113**	**98.82**	**57.26**	**5,312**	**50.55**

NOTES:

1 An additional £13.26m of assistance was offered to trade development projects between 2006-07 and 2008-09, for which this level of detail is not available.

2 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition, Invest NI supported over 8,500 new locally-owned jobs indirectly through its Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) – formerly the Start A Business Programme. Between 2006-07 and 2008-09 almost £2.9m was offered to participants on this scheme; however, in 2009-10 the programme was amended to offer only advice and guidance and no monetary support. Table 2 shows the breakdown of these jobs by financial year and District Council Area.

TABLE 2: INVEST NI ESTIMATED NUMBER OF JOBS SUPPORTED THROUGH THE ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (EDP) 2006-07 TO 2010-11 BY DCA

District Council Area	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	Total
Antrim	49	41	28	26	44	**187**
Ards	62	55	43	23	58	**242**
Armagh	60	61	44	50	62	**278**
Ballymena	49	63	36	23	37	**207**
Ballymoney	46	42	28	16	26	**157**
Banbridge	60	61	39	33	50	**243**
Belfast	190	235	187	196	293	**1,100**
Carrickfergus	29	22	21	17	18	**107**
Castlereagh	56	61	54	42	61	**275**
Coleraine	63	76	57	51	75	**321**
Cookstown	57	63	44	49	72	**285**
Craigavon	57	70	71	49	74	**320**
Derry	136	169	100	76	89	**570**
Down	75	92	55	62	67	**350**
Dungannon	74	79	69	79	106	**408**
Fermanagh	132	147	94	69	80	**522**
Larne	53	56	32	31	36	**208**
Limavady	47	69	40	34	59	**249**
Lisburn	87	90	63	72	101	**414**
Magherafelt	63	78	42	50	71	**304**
Moyle	31	45	19	14	19	**127**
Newry & Mourne	91	125	69	61	100	**446**
Newtownabbey	59	59	47	51	82	**298**
North Down	60	52	42	32	66	**253**
Omagh	74	93	75	63	89	**393**
Strabane	47	55	34	49	45	**231**
Unknown	0	0	0	3	7	**10**
Total	**1,806**	**2,058**	**1,431**	**1,321**	**1,888**	**8,504**

NOTE: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Job Creation Targets in each Council Area

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the targets set by her Department for job creation in each council area in each of the last five years; and how her Department has performed against these targets.

(AQW 3934/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI does not set targets based on geographic areas, such as District Council or Parliamentary Constituency areas.

I would refer the member to my answer to his previous question, AQW 3933 11-15, for details of how many jobs were promoted by Invest NI in each District Council Area over the last five years.

Licences for Gas Exploration

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many licences for gas exploration using the fracking method have been sought in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3987/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the member to the answer to AQW 2533/11-15.

Storing Natural Gas in the Salt Caverns Under Larne Lough

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made by Northern Ireland Energy Holdings and Portland Gas in storing natural gas in the salt caverns under Larne Lough.

(AQW 3994/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The gas storage project in question is being developed by Islandmagee Storage Ltd, a joint venture between InfraStrata plc (formerly Portland Gas) and Mutual Energy (formerly Northern Ireland Energy Holdings).

This project will require a number of licences and consents from several Departments and agencies. In July 2007, Islandmagee Storage was granted an exploration consent from The Crown Estate to evaluate the suitability of salt strata below Larne Lough to create caverns to store natural gas.

On 4th March 2011, the company was awarded a Petroleum Licence by my Department. The licence, initially for a five-year period, is for exploring the petroleum resources of the Larne – Lough Neagh sedimentary basins.

I understand that DOE Planning Service is currently considering a planning application in respect of the project.

Tourist Board's Masterclass on Sponsorship

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why representatives of the Irish Football Association and Ulster Rugby are listed to speak at the Tourist Board's Masterclass on Sponsorship and representatives of the Gaelic Athletic Association are not.

(AQW 4010/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) employs a third party to source speakers and partners for events based on a brief provided. The brief for the Masterclass on Sponsorship outlined the need to identify strong commercial sponsorship partnerships, speakers who have delivered successful high profile corporate pitches and those who have successfully managed corporate relationships when the pitch is won.

On this occasion there was a long list of potential speakers to approach for this event. The event brief was very specific in its aims and objectives, to ensure speaker examples were provided which demonstrated the closest fit.

A large number of different companies who demonstrated best practice examples of sponsorship relationships or who were involved in "pitching" processes were approached. Some speakers were unavailable which automatically eliminated their businesses while others on the target list, after closer inspection or after verbal discussions with them, were eliminated as not fulfilling the brief.

We would be interested to learn of the GAA's experience relevant to the brief above, so that they may be considered for future events.

Tourist Board's Masterclass on Sponsorship

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether representatives of the Gaelic Athletic Association were invited to speak at the Tourist Board's Masterclass on Sponsorship; and if not, why not.

(AQW 4011/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) employs a third party to source speakers and partners for events based on a brief provided. The brief for the Masterclass on Sponsorship outlined the need to identify strong commercial sponsorship partnerships, speakers who have delivered successful high profile corporate pitches and those who have successfully managed corporate relationships when the pitch is won.

On this occasion there was a long list of potential speakers to approach for this event. The event brief was very specific in its aims and objectives, to ensure speaker examples were provided which demonstrated the closest fit.

A large number of different companies who demonstrated best practice examples of sponsorship relationships or who were involved in "pitching" processes were approached. Some speakers were unavailable which automatically eliminated their businesses while others on the target list, after closer inspection or after verbal discussions with them, were eliminated as not fulfilling the brief.

We would be interested to learn of the GAA's experience relevant to the brief above, so that they may be considered for future events.

Gaelic Athletic Association

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she will take to ensure that the Gaelic Athletic Association is not treated less equally than other sporting organisations by the Tourist Board.

(AQW 4012/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Engagement is dictated by market demand, tourism priorities and the desire of the sporting organisation to get involved in tourism.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) Corporate Plan, 2008-2011 prioritised the development and promotion of participation sports golf, walking, adventure sports, cycling and canoeing. These were identified through market research and feedback from our visitors. The focus is on participation sports not spectator sports therefore there has been no regular engagement with any of the main sporting bodies.

Recently the GAA has expressed interest in tourism and as a result has agreed to support the tourist board by hosting tourism trade, press at matches and events.

To date there has been no such engagement with the IFA or Ulster Rugby Union, however the tourist board welcomes engagement from all sporting organisations, to create symbiotic relationships that will encourage spectators to increase their stay and spend.

Tourist Board

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many times the Tourist Board has held meetings with (i) the Gaelic Athletic Association; (ii) the Irish Football Association; and (iii) Ulster Rugby in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4013/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested for the period 1 January 2006 – 31 December 2009 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB).

The following information however is readily available:

i) NITB attended meetings with the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) on 8 March 2011 and 22 July 2011.

ii) NITB attended meetings with the Irish Football Association (IFA) on 12 April 2010 and 18 November 2010.

iii) NITB has not held meetings with the Irish Rugby Football Union since 1 January 2010.

Tourist Board

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what engagement the Tourist Board has had with (i) the Gaelic Athletic Association; (ii) the Irish Football Association; and (iii) Ulster Rugby regarding the marketing of their organisations over the last five years.

(AQW 4014/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is responsible for the development, promotion and marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board does not market sporting bodies or organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA); Irish Football Association (IFA) or the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU).

Therefore there has been no regular engagement with the GAA; IFA or IRFU regarding the marketing of their organisations over the last five years.

Fuel Poverty Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the report 'Tackling fuel poverty during the transition to a low-carbon economy' and the recommendations within the report.

(AQW 4020/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I understand the report was produced in response to concerns over whether a low carbon society can co-exist with a socially just approach that protects low-income consumers from higher energy bills. Against the current likelihood of ongoing rising energy prices, the report calls for an intensified focus on the two other primary drivers of fuel poverty, namely lower incomes and energy efficiency of homes, both of which are outside my area of responsibility.

However, as the report was only published at the end of October, I have not, as yet, had an opportunity to consider its full content and findings.

Go for It Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the current legal challenge by Enterprise NI against InvestNI's tendering process for the Go For It programme, and the interim service put in place by InvestNI, to detail, for the Derry City Council area for the month of October 2011, excluding referrals from the Local Enterprise Agency, (i) the number of enquiries received about starting a business; (ii) the number of business plans completed; (iii) the number of start-ups

from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas; and (iv) the number of start-ups by people not in education, employment or training.

(AQW 4044/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During October 2011, Invest NI Regional Offices dealt with over 400 new enquiries from individuals wishing to establish their own business. The North West Regional Office received over 70 new enquiries in October 2011, 20 of which related to Derry City Council Area. The North West Regional Office is awaiting postcode verification for 22 of its enquiries and it is likely that a number of these also relate to Derry City Council Area.

3 Business Plans were completed by individuals from Derry City Council Area during October, all of which related to individuals from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, and none from individuals not in education, employment or training.

Broadband UK

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the meetings she or her officials had with Broadband UK prior to the recent funding award of £4.4 million from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

(AQW 4094/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the period between submitting a bid for Broadband UK funding (13 April 2011) and the announcement of the Northern Ireland allocation (15 August 2011), my officials have held meetings with Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Broadband UK (BDUK) officials on at least six occasions. On each occasion the meetings took place via teleconferencing facilities. In addition, on 26 May 2011, DETI officials hosted a visit by the BDUK Chief Executive, Mr Rob Sullivan, during which he was fully briefed on the status of the Northern Ireland telecommunications infrastructure and urged to ensure that the Northern Ireland bid for support was given full and proper consideration.

In further support of these efforts, I also wrote on two occasions to Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport and Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries (16 June and 22 July) and on one occasion to Owen Patterson, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (16 June) to elicit their support in ensuring that Northern Ireland was not disadvantaged by adopting early-mover status in terms of next generation broadband roll-out and that we received a significant allocation under the BDUK initiative. Furthermore, I spoke personally to Ed Vaizey on 20 July to reinforce the Northern Ireland case.

As I have stated in previous responses to assembly questions, the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport has advised that he is considering allocating further funding to Northern Ireland in support of a pilot project to explore ways of taking superfast broadband to all homes and businesses. My officials are continuing to engage with their counterparts in DCMS on this issue. It is also my intention to ensure that this and the £4.4m allocation announced in August remain high on the Whitehall agenda through my quarterly meetings with Hugo Swire, Minister of State for Northern Ireland, the first of which is due to take place towards the end of November.

Ballykelly: Former Army Barracks

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her involvement in compiling and putting into action a strategy and masterplan for the future development of the former army barracks at Ballykelly, which was recently acquired by the Office of the First and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 4098/11-15)

Mrs Foster: To date I have had no involvement in the compilation or implementation of any masterplan for the redevelopment of the Ballykelly site.

Gas Industry: Growth

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to promote growth in the gas industry.

(AQW 4113/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Natural gas is the least polluting fossil fuel and is now available to some 150,000 energy consumers in Northern Ireland, mostly in the Greater Belfast area.

You will be aware that my Department has recently consulted on extension of the natural gas network. Any extension of the gas network, e.g. to towns in the west of Northern Ireland and in East Down, would support the development of a more secure, sustainable and diverse heat market which would provide greater energy choice for consumers and businesses.

Over the coming months my Department will be engaging further with the Utility Regulator and the natural gas industry in relation to how the gas network extension may be progressed. I am also keen to explore how gas infrastructure can also be utilised for bio-gas.

Committee on Climate Change Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of recent report by the Committee for Climate Change 'The Appropriateness of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act' which recommends that efforts to cut emissions and reduce fuel poverty should be focused on switching from fossil fuels to renewable heating.

(AQW 4115/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Strategic Energy Framework 2010 already commits Northern Ireland to switching from its reliance on imported fossil fuels to a more sustainable energy future and includes challenging targets aimed at achieving 40% of our electricity consumption from renewable sources and 10% renewable heat, both by 2020.

Furthermore, the Framework seeks, where economically feasible, to encourage extension of the natural gas network. Natural gas is the least polluting fossil fuel and, as such, further extension of the network will result in displacement of oil and coal usage and will therefore bring about reductions in CO2 emissions contributing to Northern Ireland's low carbon energy strategy.

Unemployment Rates: Projections

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her Department's projections for unemployment rates in each of the next five years.

(AQW 4142/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not produce projections for unemployment.

Broadband UK Fund

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the allocation of £4.4 million from a total Broadband UK fund of £530 million.

(AQW 4143/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Pursuant to my response to Assembly Question AQW 2206/11-15, I would re-iterate that, with the completion of my Department's Next Generation Broadband Project and the roll-out of BT's own superfast broadband investment programme, by March 2012 approximately 89% of premises in Northern Ireland will be connected to a fibred access point. This leaves around 11% of premises, which will tend to be located in the most expensive to reach areas, to which it will be necessary to find alternative means of deploying broadband services with speeds that are in line with the commitments of the UK Broadband Strategy.

In August, when the announcement of funding from BDUK was made, I issued a press statement in which I registered my disappointment that Northern Ireland had been allocated only £4.4m, which is considerably less than the £10m bid that we submitted. At the same time, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, to voice my concern. In his response, I was advised that Northern Ireland could potentially benefit from additional funding to be used in support of a pilot project exploring other ways of taking superfast broadband to all homes and businesses. My officials are continuing to engage with their counterparts in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and officials within BDUK on this issue.

Mobile Phone Coverage and Broadband Provision

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the representations she has made to the British Government regarding the current gaps in mobile phone coverage and broadband provision.

(AQW 4145/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are no gaps in broadband provision in Northern Ireland.

The continuing importance of mobile communication services has again been recognised by my Department, with mobile coverage one of the key themes in our recently closed consultation on telecoms investment priorities for period 2011-2015.

In the last 12 months I have made a number of representations to Ministers in the UK Government regarding telecommunications issues in Northern Ireland, including that of poor mobile coverage.

This includes the provision of briefing to Hugo Swire, Minister of State for Northern Ireland whose appointment to the Whitehall Ministerial Group on Broadband I endorsed in September 2010 to represent Northern Ireland interests. I have also taken part in meetings with Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries and Owen Patterson, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at which the challenges faced by Northern Ireland consumers in accessing mobiles services, particularly in rural areas, have been highlighted.

Most recently, when pursuing the Northern Ireland allocation under the BDUK initiative, I have also written to Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Ed Vaizey and Owen Patterson to secure their support in ensuring that Northern Ireland received a suitable allocation that would allow my Department to take forward initiatives addressing the key themes established under the 2011-2015 Action Plan. This has also been a feature of meetings with the aforementioned Ministers, together with access to funds under the £150m recently announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer as being available for improvements to mobile communications coverage across the UK.

Friends of the Earth 'Reckless Gamblers' Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 4021/11-15, (i) for her assessment of the comments by the Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research that the 'Reckless Gamblers' report is "essential reading for all policy makers"; (ii) whether she has read this report; and (iii) whether the release of this report warrants an update of the 2010 Strategic Energy Framework.

(AQW 4201/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Several of my Energy Division officials have read the report.

I am confident that the Strategic Energy Framework remains the right framework for Northern Ireland and I have no plans to update the SEF.

Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why she has yet to publish InterTradeIreland's report 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Co-operation'.

(AQW 4237/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQO 681/11-15.

O2 Mobile Phone Coverage in Cloughmills

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what her Department is doing to restore O2 mobile phone coverage in Cloughmills which was reduced as a result of last year's severe winter weather.

(AQW 4239/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The telecoms market is fully privatised and independently regulated by the Office of Communications. It is a matter for the telecoms companies to decide how best to operate and run their networks. DETI has no contracts currently with O2 or any of the mobile phone companies and has no powers to compel or direct them to provide services to any specific locations across Northern Ireland. If consumers are unhappy with the services being provided they should in the first instance take it up with the company. If they continue to remain unhappy they should then seek advice from OFCOM. Ultimately if they are dissatisfied with the service they can opt to switch to another provider with services in the area.

O2 Mobile Phone Coverage in Cloughmills

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of why O2 mobile phone coverage in the Cloughmills area was reduced as a result of last year's severe winter weather; and how O2 has responded to this problem.

(AQW 4240/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As mentioned in reply to AQW 4239/11-15 the telecoms market is fully privatised and independently regulated by the Office of Communications. It is a matter for the telecoms companies to decide how best to operate and run their networks. The companies are not compelled to inform DETI of faults across their networks. To date DETI has not been informed of this specific issue and no assessment has been made.

Energy Regulator

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Energy Regulator about the introduction of social tariffs; and whether such initiatives will form part of any strategy for addressing fuel poverty included in the Programme for Government.

(AQW 4271/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not had any recent discussions with the Utility Regulator regarding the introduction of social tariffs. As I have stated previously, the introduction of a social tariff would be extremely complex and unlikely to solve the hardships caused by fuel poverty.

Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she will publish InterTradeIreland's report 'Agri-Food: A Study for Cross Border Cooperation'.

(AQW 4309/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQO 681/11-15.

Department of the Environment

Endangered Wildlife Species

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has undertaken, or plans to undertake, a study on endangered wildlife species.

(AQW 423/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Natural Heritage Directorate of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has a long record of undertaking and commissioning studies on endangered wildlife species.

Officials can be directly involved in such studies, such as surveys or monitoring for rare species or regular monitoring of protected species. On occasions where specialist evidence or research is required NIEA will commission or procure a specific study. For example, in recent years there have been studies to determine population size of hares; recording projects to establish population distribution of dragonflies, and various surveys of sublittoral marine species.

Currently there is a range of projects ongoing, including a study into the factors contributing to declining populations of nesting seabirds on RathlinIsland.

Future projects are also planned, which include restoration and long term monitoring of Horse mussel (Modiolus modiolus) reefs in Strangford Lough; and a study into 'Squirrelpox' virus in Northern Ireland which will help to quantify the risk the invasive grey squirrels pose to the native red squirrel population.

Reports detailing the findings of such studies can be found on the NIEA web pages.

Motor Tax: Revenue Generated

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment how much revenue has been generated from motor tax in each of the last three years.

(AQW 662/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Motor tax collected in each of the last three years is outlined below –

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£163m	£164m	£167m

Vehicle Licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) under a formal agreement between DoE and the Department for Transport. Motor Tax in Northern Ireland is collected by DVA on behalf of the Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA GB), an executive agency of the Department for Transport.

Herds of Wild Deer

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the areas that have herds of wild deer, including the estimated numbers and the different species.

(AQW 1018/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA commissioned a desk top study in 2002 of all available records of wild deer. The resulting report did not give an overall estimate of the deer population in Northern Ireland but listed specific areas within each county which were attributed population estimates.

The report concluded that there had been an increase in the rate of spread of deer in Northern Ireland over the preceding ten years.

The three resident deer species i.e.Red Deer, Fallow and Sika were recorded in each county in Northern Ireland except Down and Armagh which had no records for Sika.

Muntjac Deer, an introduced species, have recently been reported from several locations in Northern Ireland but are only confirmed present in the ArdsPeninsula area in CountyDown where the species is thought to be present in very low numbers.

Planning Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many decisions of the Planning Service have been the subject of judicial review in each of the last five years, broken down by planning office; (ii) of these, how many found in favour of the applicant; and (iii) the total cost to his Department of these judicial reviews.

(AQW 2377/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) how many decisions of the Planning Service have been subject of judicial review in each of the last five years, broken down by planning office;

The table below details the number of judicial reviews on decisions on planning applications held in the last 5 years.

Area Office	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total number of cases
Ballymena	0	0	1	1	0	2
Belfast	0	0	2	1	0	3
Downpatrick	0	1	0	3	1	5
Headquarters	0	0	1	2	1	4
Omagh	1	0	2	3	0	6

(ii) of these, how many found in favour of the applicant

The information in the table below relates to the total number of cases in the table above.

Area Office	Decisions in favour of applicant
Ballymena	1
Belfast	1
Downpatrick	0
Headquarters	0
Omagh	4

(iii) the total cost to the Department of these judicial reviews

The total cost paid by the Department as recorded in the Annual Report and Accounts in relation to these reviews in the last four years is £107,986.20 as of end of March 2011. This includes costs awarded and legal costs.

Illegally Dumped Waste

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the sites which have been identified as containing illegally dumped waste originating in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 2492/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA cannot release the locations of the repatriation sites, as legal proceedings are still ongoing in some cases, and there is a need to protect the confidentiality of the landowners etc. They will however publicise the locations of specific sites close to the time when work commences. To date NIEA have repatriated waste from sites at Slattinagh in County Fermanagh, Trillick in County Tyrone and work is nearing completion at a third site in Ballymartin County Down.

Theft of Metals from Buildings

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment given the increase in the theft of metals from buildings, what plans his Department has to introduce safeguards for legitimate dealers in scrap metal, such as introducing a requirement for people selling scrap metal to produce identification.

(AQW 2540/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The theft of metal is an international problem with unprecedented demand from the Far East pushing up worldwide prices of metals to an all time high. Whilst the big majority of scrap metal dealers are legitimate and law-abiding, there are a few unscrupulous dealers who are facilitating the theft of metals.

In Great Britain, the Home Office has set up a working group tasked with recommending how metal theft can be tackled effectively. The Group is chaired by British Transport Police and comprises representatives from law enforcement, the utilities sector and government departments.

In the first instance, the working group will focus on the prevention of metal theft. However, it is accepted that resolution of the problem may also require amendment of waste management legislation. The option to amend legislation to require the production of photographic identification is one of the proposals under consideration.

I have asked Departmental officials to keep me informed of developments; I can then assess whether existing NI waste management legislation needs to be changed.

Scrap Metal Dealers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to introduce or amend legislation which will make legally binding checks on suppliers and sources mandatory for scrap metal dealers.

(AQW 2604/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The theft of metal is an international problem with unprecedented demand from the Far East pushing up worldwide prices of metals to an all time high. Whilst the big majority of scrap metal dealers are legitimate and law-abiding, there are a few unscrupulous dealers who are facilitating the theft of metals.

In Great Britain, the Home Office has set up a working group tasked with recommending how metal theft can be tackled effectively. The Group is chaired by British Transport Police and comprises representatives from law enforcement, the utilities sector and government departments.

In the first instance, the working group will focus on the prevention of metal theft. However, it is accepted that resolution of the problem may also require amendment of waste management legislation. The option to amend legislation to require the production of photographic identification is one of the proposals under consideration.

I have asked Departmental officials to keep me informed of developments; I can then assess whether existing NI waste management legislation needs to be changed.

EU Directive 2009/113/EC

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of the Environment how rigorously he plans to implement the Commission Directive 2009/113/EC in relation to driving regulations for people with diabetes.

(AQW 2824/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Commission Directives 2009/112/EC and 2009/113/EC ("the Directives") - which amend the 2nd and 3rd Directives on Driving Licences respectively - introduce revised minimum medical standards in relation to diabetes mellitus (as well as eyesight and epilepsy) for applicants for driving licences or for the renewal of such licences. The Directives allow Member States to have higher than the minimum EU standard.

NI was included in a UK-wide consultation on changes resulting from the Directives carried out by the Driver and Vehicle Agency in Swansea earlier this year. The consultation covered various options to relax some existing standards based on medical expert opinion that there would be no risk to road safety and to clarify other standards.

Following completion of the consultation process, I have agreed to remove the existing blanket ban in NI on insulin treated diabetics holding taxi driver licences. The necessary amending legislation is currently being drafted and it is expected that it will come into operation in January 2012. Once the new arrangements are in place insulin treated diabetics will be able to be considered for taxi driver licences provided that the standards in the Directives are met.

In addition, it is planned to introduce other changes in relation to diabetes mellitus resulting from the Directives to ensure a consistent implementation approach across the UK. This will involve amending the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1996 to make changes to the circumstances in which diabetes is a prescribed disability and to the prescribed conditions under which a licence can be granted to a diabetic. The amendments will implement the Directives by either providing additional legal certainty in giving legislative effect to standards previously applied by administrative guidance or introducing options to relax existing standards in the 1996 Regulations for Group 2 (buses and lorries) licences.

More specifically, the amending legislation will include setting out the circumstances in which a Group 1 (cars and motorcycles) licence must be refused in the case of diabetes treated with medication other than insulin. The circumstances where a licence may be granted to such persons provided the disability is controlled will continue to be set out in guidance rather than in legislation as this will permit greater flexibility in the duration of licence granted, commensurate with the road safety risk.

In the case of Group 2 licences, the amending legislation will open up the possibility of licences for insulin treated diabetics where the condition is appropriately controlled and provided the standards in the Directives are met.

The Department currently expects the necessary legislation for these other changes in relation to diabetes mellitus to be made in 2012.

EU Directive 2009/113/EC

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment, following the adoption of the European Directive 2009/113/EC, to outline his Department's plans for implementation and any deviation.

(AQW 2855/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Commission Directives 2009/112/EC and 2009/113/EC ("the Directives") - which amend the 2nd and 3rd Directives on Driving Licences respectively - introduce revised minimum medical standards in relation to diabetes mellitus, eyesight and epilepsy for applicants for driving licences or for the renewal of such licences. The Directives allow Member States to have higher than the minimum EU standard.

NI was included in a UK-wide consultation on changes resulting from the Directives carried out by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea earlier this year. The consultation covered various

options to relax some existing standards based on medical expert opinion that there would be no risk to road safety and to clarify other standards.

Following completion of the consultation process, I have agreed to remove the existing blanket ban in NI on insulin treated diabetics holding taxi driver licences. The necessary amending legislation is currently being drafted and it is expected that it will come into operation in January 2012. Once the new arrangements are in place, insulin treated diabetics will be able to be considered for taxi driver licences provided that the standards in the Directives are met.

In addition, it is planned to introduce other changes in relation to diabetes mellitus resulting from the Directives to ensure a consistent implementation approach across the UK. This will involve amending the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1996 to make changes to the circumstances in which diabetes is a prescribed disability and to the prescribed conditions under which a licence can be granted to a diabetic. The amendments will implement the Directives by either providing additional legal certainty in giving legislative effect to standards previously applied by administrative guidance or introducing options to relax existing standards in the 1996 Regulations for Group 2 (buses and lorries) licences.

More specifically, the amending legislation will include setting out the circumstances in which a Group 1 (cars and motorcycles) licence must be refused in the case of diabetes treated with medication other than insulin. The circumstances where a licence may be granted to such persons provided the disability is controlled will continue to be set out in guidance rather than in legislation as this will permit greater flexibility in the duration of licence granted, commensurate with the road safety risk.

In the case of Group 2 licences, the amending legislation will open up the possibility .of licences for insulin treated diabetics where the condition is appropriately controlled and provided the standards in the Directives are met.

The Department currently expects the necessary legislation for these other changes in relation to diabetes mellitus to be made in 2012.

European Directives are normally transposed uniformly across the UK Member State and it is my intention to do so in this instance by implementing fully the minimum standards of medical fitness for diabetes as specified in the Directives.

In the case of eyesight and epilepsy, it is the intention in Britain to make legislative changes next year. The Department, in considering the way forward in NI in relation to these aspects of the Directives, will continue to liaise closely with colleagues in Britain on developments.

Taxi Enforcement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what additional measures are being implemented to ensure improved and increased taxi enforcement.

(AQW 2872/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver and Vehicle Agency is continuously seeking to improve taxi enforcement on Northern Ireland roads and it uses intelligence led and targeted approach to pursue the habitual and high risk offenders at the roadside.

The Agency has recently increased its taxi enforcement staffing resource to 15 officers which has allowed it to establish a new dedicated taxi enforcement team in Londonderry. This is comprised of five officers (one Team Manager and four temporary Enforcement Officers pending the appointment of four permanent officers).

The Agency also anticipates the introduction of the second phase of the Graduated Fixed Penalty and Deposit Scheme which will enable a more comprehensive range of Fixed Penalty Notices to be issued for taxi related offences.

Introduction of new legislation under the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 is also planned which will change how taxi operator licensing is regulated. It is anticipated that new initiatives such as single tier licensing will change on-street licensing restrictions allowing additional enforcement resources to be redirected towards the investigation of more serious types of illegal activity.

Taxi Ranks

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to ensure that there is no queue jumping by taxis at taxi ranks.

(AQW 2886/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver and Vehicle Agency has primary responsibility for taxi enforcement however the regulation of taxis at taxi ranks including their orderly queuing is the responsibility of the Department of Regional Development.

Local Councils

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether it is possible for local councils to borrow money; (ii) if so, how much each council has borrowed and at what interest rates, in each of the last three years; and (iii) how much debt each council has outstanding.

(AQW 2971/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) Councils can borrow money from the Consolidated Fund under Section 61 (1) of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972.

(ii) The level of council borrowing is provided in the table below. It has proven difficult to obtain all the interest rates for the considerable number of loans involved. It might be helpful for you to know that interest rates for the loans, which are all arranged through the Department of Finance and Personnel, vary due to a number of factors, including the day of borrowing and the length of the loan. All loans, however, are approved by DFP which has a uniform handling process, and which is recognised as providing loans at lower than commercial rates, thus representing best value. If you are interested in specific loans and rates, I would be happy to provide these.

(iii) The amount of outstanding debt for each council as of 30 September 2011 is also provided in the table below.

District Council	Amounts borrowed 2008-09	Amounts Borrowed 2009-10	Amounts Borrowed 2010-11	Amounts Borrowed 2011-12	Total Outstanding @ 30 Sept 2011
Antrim	0.00	750,000.00	0.00	0.00	15,182,480.52
Ards	0.00	0.00	695,886.00	0.00	6,196,248.70
Armagh	5,320,000.00	760,000.00	3,650,000.00	0.00	27,605,116.79
Ballymena	5,345,721.00	2,092,422.00	0.00	0.00	24,436,385.82
Ballymoney	0.00	1,224,793.00	0.00	317,000.00	9,454,076.92
Banbridge	5,012,000.00	1,723,500.00	1,742,700.00	1,601,100.00	20,428,518.04
Belfast	0.00	11,152,000.00	0.00	0.00	25,852,529.89
Carrickfergus	7,031,784.00	1,842,567.00	136,000.00	368,876.00	19,817,045.80
Castlereagh	1,931,411.00	0.00	922,165.75	0.00	18,612,584.59
Coleraine	2,780,500.00	2,340,000.00	0.00	0.00	20,917,451.14
Cookstown	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,487,123.18
Craigavon	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,492,591.21
Derry	4,174,350.00	1,274,400.00	4,088,600.00	0.00	26,149,593.74
Down	0.00	1,410,000.00	3,337,000.00	0.00	16,928,145.10
Dungannon	2,287,864.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,481,440.08

District Council	Amounts borrowed 2008-09	Amounts Borrowed 2009-10	Amounts Borrowed 2010-11	Amounts Borrowed 2011-12	Total Outstanding @ 30 Sept 2011
Fermanagh	0.00	1,800,000.00	0.00	0.00	3,505,713.14
Larne	2,891,202.00	1,675,148.00	3,539,948.00	1,396,711.50	14,053,955.81
Limavady	1,200,361.00	1,868,000.00	1,200,000.00	0.00	12,395,920.09
Lisburn	0.00	284,054.00	516,465.00	0.00	18,525,881.50
Magherafelt	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Moyle	524,295.00	677,550.00	330,500.00	0.00	8,754,809.44
Newry	2,026,713.00	877,000.00	1,981,000.00	0.00	18,800,273.56
N'abbey	8,650,000.00	10,357,500.00	4,223,144.00	58,500.00	46,043,447.33
North Down	3,644,479.00	1,210,300.00	3,320,095.00	0.00	28,449,132.10
Omagh	453,500.00	2,000,000.00	0.00	0.00	10,213,976.91
Strabane	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,309,732.35
Council Totals	**53,274,180.75**	**45,319,234.00**	**29,683,503.75**	**3,742,187.50**	**401,094,173.75**

Local Council Staff

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of staff employed by each local council, broken down by post.

(AQW 2972/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The total number of staff employed by each local council is provided in the tables below. The information has been obtained from individual councils.

Unfortunately, two of the councils, Derry City Council and North Down Borough Council, use the Hodgson pay scale system and thus the information is not readily comparable. Separate tables have been provided.

Council	Chief Exec	CO/ DIR	PO 12-13	PO 11	PO 10	PO 9	PO8	PO7	PO6	PO5	PO4	PO3
Antrim	1	2						9		2	6	10
Ards	1	4						3	5	6	4	4
Armagh	1	5			3		1	3	1	6	4	9
Ballymena	1	4					4	6	2	6	6	12
Ballymoney	1	2						1	1	6		
Banbridge	1	4				1		2	1	4	2	5
Belfast	1	17	6	4	11	15	22	43	30	17	161	80
Carrickfergus	1			3					2		3	4
Castlereagh	1	5					1	1	7	2	7	7
Coleraine	1	2	1		2			3	3	1	6	3
Cookstown	1	3	1		1				3	2	5	5
Craigavon	1	5		1				5	1	4	14	5
Derry												

Council	Chief Exec	CO/ DIR	PO 12-13	PO 11	PO 10	PO 9	PO8	PO7	PO6	PO5	PO4	PO3
Down	1	5							11	2	8	6
Dungannon	1	2	1	2				4		5	5	3
Fermanagh	1	4						1	1		6	7
Larne	1	2								5	3	2
Limavady	1	2			2				5	2		
Lisburn	1	3				*13				*29		
Magherafelt	1	5							2	2	1	4
Moyle	1	2			1			4		2	1	3
Newry/Mourne	1	5			1		1	2	1	13	2	5
Newtownabbey	1	4					1	1	3	11	3	11
North Down												
Omagh	1	8						3	2	5	10	1
Strabane	1	5							1	1	2	6

Council	PO2	PO1	SO2	SO1	Scale 6	Scale 5	Scale 4	Scale 3	Scale 2	Scale 1	Other	Total
Antrim	5	20	6	27	16	20	25	119	59	66	12	**405**
Ards	16	8	12	29	22	14	45	101	50	75	1	**400**
Armagh	8	22	27	17	23	15	71	30	51	29		**326**
Ballymena	11	26	15	12	26	22	32	73	31	27	9	**325**
Ballymoney	2	8	4	6	8	7	16	48	10	18		**138**
Banbridge	10	10	15	11	13	16	25	64	40	27		**251**
Belfast	57	105	68	147	185	177	285	561	433	97		**2,522**
Carrickfergus	6	11	9	17	6	15	29	60	15	26		**207**
Castlereagh	10	14	18	22	27	37	31	30	46	235		**501**
Coleraine	7	25	12	19	14	25	17	71	36	58	13	**319**
Cookstown	6	11	13	12	21	23	40	48	55	20		**269**
Craigavon	24	23	13	24	44	27	87	130	132	33	27	**600**
Derry												**565**
Down	9	20	12	22	20	27	37	56	86	41	17	**380**
Dungannon	8	16	9	18	8	14	25	138	65	13	8	**345**
Fermanagh	4	20	2	14	18	13	50	52	55	50		**298**

Council	PO2	PO1	SO2	SO1	Scale 6	Scale 5	Scale 4	Scale 3	Scale 2	Scale 1	Other	Total
Larne	6	6	5	11	9	10	7	25	10	67	6	**175**
Limavady	5	9	5	14	10	15	36	32	25	11		**174**
Lisburn			*83		*34	14	37	16	60	61	161	**512**
Magherafelt	3	7	1	4	6	10	5	18	8	81	9	**167**
Moyle	5	6	4	6	3	7	10	4		1		**60**
Newry/Mourne	9	24	9	51	35	24	83	148	73	7		**494**
Newtownabbey	6	11	25	27	26	28	24	129	53	52	1	**417**
North Down												**456**
Omagh	9	23	13	32	17	35	28	85	89	101		**462**
Strabane	5	12	4	10	16	23	35	125	32	30		**308**

*Cannot differentiate further

CO – Chief Officer/Directors

PO – Principal Officer

SO – Senior Officer

Derrycity Council Grade's	NO
Chief Executive	1
Strategic Director	2
Senior Assistant Chief Officer	8
Instructor	1
Assistant Chief Officer	10
Chief Officer	5
Scale Point 38-46	36
Scale Point 29-37	93
Scale Point 22-28	37
Scale Point 14-25	27
Scale Point 14-21	22
Scale Point 4-17	34
Scale Point 8	14
Scale Point 7	19
Scale Point 6	154
Scale Point 5	26
Scale Point 4	63

Derrycity Council Grade's	**NO**
Other – craft, fitter, mechanic, electrician	13
Total	**565**

North Down Council Grade's	**NO**
Chief Executive	1
Chief Officer	2
PO12	2
PO10	1
PO6	2
PO5	1
PO4	2
PO2	1
SO2	1
Senior Management	3
Middle Management	11
Junior Management	45
Salary Scale 6	1
Salary Scale 5/6	55
Salary Scale 3/5	45
Salary Scale 1/3	34
SinglePointSCP 16	6
SinglePointSCP 14	1
SinglePointSCP 13	3
SinglePointSCP 9	8
SinglePointSCP 8	40
SinglePointSCP 7	5
SinglePointSCP 6	75
SinglePointSCP 5	54
SinglePointSCP 4	47
Other	**10**
	456

Planning Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average length of time taken to process (i) a planning application; and (ii) a streamlined planning application, in each of the last three years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 3010/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The average length of time taken to process (i) a planning application; and (ii) a streamlined planning application, in each of the last three years, broken down by council area is set out in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME TAKEN TO PROCESS (I) A PLANNING APPLICATION; AND (II) A STREAMLINED PLANNING APPLICATION, IN EACH OF THE LAST THREE YEARS, BROKEN DOWN BY COUNCIL AREA.

	2008/09		2009/10		2010/11	
Table 1	**Time to process planning application (days)**	**Time to process streamlined application (days)**	**Time to process planning application (days)**	**Time to process streamlined application (days)**	**Time to process planning application (days)**	**Time to process streamlined application (days)**
Antrim	68	25	43	25	38	29
Ards	106	31	94	43	92	73
Armagh	91	29	81	46	133	100
Ballymena	85	30	56	32	68	51
Ballymoney	76	29	68	48	84	65
Banbridge	117	30	61	29	82	53
Belfast	85	20	60	27	80	55
Carrickfergus	74	N/A	48	26	47	31
Castlereagh	77	N/A	54	31	90	71
Coleraine	99	24	56	30	61	38
Cookstown	104	23	78	34	74	54
Craigavon	92	25	66	33	79	52
Derry	69	36	65	49	78	57
Down	116	28	94	38	92	70
Dungannon	70	25	53	30	53	42
Fermanagh	85	25	57	28	45	31
Larne	96	N/A	63	27	70	46
Limavady	78	25	60	36	87	56
Lisburn	141	30	98	46	101	71
Magherafelt	125	25	58	32	54	36
Moyle	113	25	102	52	100	66

Table 1	2008/09		2009/10		2010/11	
	Time to process planning application (days)	Time to process streamlined application (days)	Time to process planning application (days)	Time to process streamlined application (days)	Time to process planning application (days)	Time to process streamlined application (days)
Newry And Mourne	124	31	82	44	102	70
Newtownabbey	97	21	77	28	92	70
North Down	109	30	69	39	61	41
Omagh	91	26	83	46	75	50
Strabane	69	29	54	36	59	44

Note: Average is the median

Waste Management Schemes

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the proposed waste management schemes for (i) SWaMP2008; (ii) Arc 21; and (iii) the North West Region Waste Management Group.

(AQW 3117/11-15)

Mr Attwood: All three Waste Management Groups successfully completed external assessments of their projects in the period January to June 2011. Each of them continues to advance the public procurement process in which it invited bidders to apply for the contract to provide the facilities and services required.

While much of the detailed information pertaining to the procurements is subject to restrictions imposed by public procurement law and commercial confidentiality requirements, I can confirm the current position of each procurement to be as follows:

North West Region Waste Management Group closed dialogue on 19 July 2011 and is now evaluating the bidder's final tender. The programme timeline for NWRWMG schedules Contract Award for Jan/Feb 2012, commencement of interim diversion for April 2012, commencement of main construction by May 2012 and Plant Operational by July 2013.

SWaMP2008 expects to close dialogue shortly. Issues currently being addressed include the closure of landfill sites in line with the commissioning and subsequent operation of the Mechanical Biological Treatment facility. Planning and environmental permitting matters are being addressed in tandem with the procurement. Contract award is currently scheduled for February 2012.

Arc21 suspended dialogue with its remaining bidder in March 2011 pending resolution of governance issues around affordability and value for money. Dialogue has now re-commenced and the revised date proposed for contract award is August to November 2012.

I confirm that I have told the three procurement groups that I am being highly vigilant around the affordability and deliverability of the three projects. This is the perspective I will bring to this important issue.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the difference in the number of cases dealt with by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency between January-June 2010 and January - June 2011.

(AQW 3715/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency deals with a wide range of operational matters.

The cases listed below represent the main categories in the Agency's wide ranging operational activities undertaken to protect the environment and safeguard legitimate industry. More detail on the Agency's extensive work is set out in the most recent Annual Report published in July 2011. A copy of which is available at http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/foi/recent-releases/publications-details.htm?docid=8345

	January – June 2010	**January – June 2011**
Environmental Crime Unit prosecutions	25	17
Conservation, Design and Protection prosecutions	0	1
Water Management Unit prosecutions	25	15
Industrial Pollution and Radio Chemical Inspectorate prosecutions	2	4
Total prosecutions	54	37
Ministerial cases	439	294
Total Planning consultations	3047	3372
WMU pollution	1225	1118
IPRI pollution	2	6
Total Pollution	**1227**	**1124**

Fly-posting

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the effectiveness of current legislation to deal with the problem of fly-posting.

(AQW 3759/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Currently the Department has power under Article 84 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 to take proceedings against any person displaying an advertisement in contravention of the Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations (NI) 1992 (the 'Advertisement Regulations'). Under Article 84 of the 1991 Order, any person found displaying an advertisement in contravention of the Advertisement Regulations is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine of up to £2500 and, in the case of continuing offences, of up to £250 for each day during which the offence continues.

However, while the Department can take action against the landowner, occupier or person benefiting from the advertisement, it must be in a position to identify the person responsible and have sufficient evidence to prove that they displayed the poster. It is a defence for an alleged offender to prove that the poster was displayed without their knowledge or consent. Also, in many cases the Department only becomes aware that fly-posting has taken place after the event, and it has proved difficult to obtain the required evidence to pursue a prosecution, particularly in tracing the person who posted the advertisement.

Under Article 18 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, district councils have powers to remove or obliterate any placard or poster displayed in contravention of the Advertisement Regulations and, in certain circumstances, to recover the costs they incur in doing so. District councils have, however, encountered practical difficulties with using these powers.

I acknowledge that there are difficulties with the current powers available to tackle the scourge of fly-posting. That is why in taking forward the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland)

2011 ("the 2011 Act"), I believe the Department has responded positively to calls made by district councils to give them a robust set of powers to tackle fly-posting more effectively.

The 2011 Act strengthens the law in relation to fly-posting by:–

- providing councils with the power to issue fixed penalty notices in respect of certain fly-posting offences;
- enabling councils to serve Defacement Removal Notices on statutory undertakers and the other owners of street furniture requiring them to remove fly-posters from their property;
- amending existing powers available to district councils to remove fly-posters to ensure that –
  - the council can act more quickly to remove the fly-poster;
  - the landowner or occupier, who in all likelihood is the victim of the defacement, is not responsible for the cost of removing it and that the cost is borne, where possible, by the person who committed the act of defacement or the person whose goods, trade, business or other concerns are publicised by it; and
  - existing loopholes, which allow the beneficiaries of fly-posting to avoid liability and to continue to benefit from free illegal advertising, are closed;
- amending the defence currently available to the beneficiaries of fly-posting to make it more difficult for them to escape prosecution; and
- providing councils with additional powers to gather information in relation to fly-posting offences.

It is the Department's intention to introduce the 2011 Act in April 2012 and I trust this will provide councils with a more timely and effective solution to the problem of fly-posting.

Driver and Vehicle Agency Testing Centres

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the ratio of the vehicles which required re-testing at each Driver and Vehicle Agency testing centre between 2005 and 2010.

(AQW 3773/11-15)

Mr Attwood: For the purpose of this response the ratio of vehicles which required retesting is taken to mean the total number of vehicles that undertook a retest as a percentage of the total number of vehicle tests conducted in each of the test centres for the financial years 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11.

The details for the requested period are included in the following table.

Test Centre	% 2005/06	% 2006/07	% 2007/08	% 2008/09	% 2009/10	% 2010/11
Armagh	22.53	22.23	21.56	18.60	17.90	17.18
Ballymena	17.83	18.36	18.23	17.76	17.68	17.78
Belfast	20.81	18.54	18.60	17.29	17.52	18.17
Coleraine	19.01	16.97	16.70	16.40	17.01	17.01
Cookstown	24.25	22.88	21.82	19.05	19.25	19.66
Craigavon	22.06	20.59	20.22	19.03	19.39	18.25
Downpatrick	17.69	17.20	16.08	15.19	15.84	15.69
Enniskillen	18.74	17.87	18.23	17.61	17.78	18.78
Larne	14.66	13.64	13.92	14.88	17.61	15.97
Lisburn	20.81	16.19	15.21	14.86	14.25	14.30

Test Centre	% 2005/06	% 2006/07	% 2007/08	% 2008/09	% 2009/10	% 2010/11
Londonderry	20.79	19.63	19.11	18.72	19.57	19.19
Mallusk	21.65	19.45	19.00	17.40	16.97	17.36
Newry	19.78	16.79	16.18	15.75	16.92	18.26
Newtownards	19.82	19.22	19.88	19.82	18.06	16.90
Omagh	22.63	18.90	19.23	19.38	18.91	19.48
Total	**20.31**	**18.66**	**18.38**	**17.57**	**17.66**	**17.65**

Department of Finance and Personnel

Land and Property Services

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why Land and Property Services will not release house price sale information, as is done in the rest of the UK.

(AQW 3995/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): In England and Wales house price sale information is released by Land Registry. Land registration legislation in Northern Ireland and supporting processes differ from the rest of the UK. As a result the Land Registry in Northern Ireland does not hold a comprehensive record of all house sales and therefore the information is not available for release in the same manner. However, details of property ownership are available to all as the Register is open to examination by the public.

Land & Property Services (LPS) also receives house price sales information for Northern Ireland from Stamp Duty Land Tax returns supplied by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) under a statutory authority which precludes onward release of that informationwithout HMRC consent.HMRC has recently confirmed that such consent would not be granted under any circumstances.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Kinship Care NI

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to implement any of the recommendations contained within the report by Kinship Care NI 'Moving Forward with Kinship Care in Northern Ireland', which include; (i) the development of a Kinship Care Strategy; (ii) statutory guidance on family and friends care within the Health and Social Care Trusts; (iii) funding to help kinship carers meet the needs of children in their care; and (iv) funding for research into Kinship Care over a three year period to establish a baseline for the positive outcomes of Kinship Care in comparison with other provision.

(AQW 4071/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Kinship Care in Northern Ireland has only recently submitted its policy document to my Department. My officials are currently considering the document and it will be discussed at a meeting with Kinship Care scheduled for 23 November.

Kinship Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have lived in Kinship Care in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) constituency.

(AQW 4082/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally relating to how many children have lived in Kinship Care or short-term (3 months or less) Kinship Care in each of the last three years. The nearest available figures to those you have requested are detailed below for your information.

The numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements at 31 March each year from 2009 to 2011, by Health and Social Care Trust, are detailed in Table 1. Aggregation of the numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements, at 31 March 2011, by those living with grandparents, siblings or other Kinship Carers' requires an extensive clerical exercise and could only be provided at disproportionate costs. The figures reported in Table 1 are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 1

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	151	208	206
Northern	N/A	102	166
South Eastern	144	157	165
Southern	109	99	104
Western	63	52	76
Northern Ireland	**467**	**618**	**717**

Source: HSC Board end of year Corporate Parenting Reports.

Data are Not Available for the Northern Trust for 2009.

My Department has recently consulted on Guidance on the Assessment and Support of Kinship Foster Carers', the aims of which are to ensure a regional approach by Trusts to the assessment and support of Kinship Carers' which recognises their unique situation whilst safeguarding the child. For the purposes of the guide 'Kinship Carers" means relatives (as defined in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 Article 2.2 refers) and friends who are caring for a child or young person full time. Friends may include other people with a prior connection to the child e.g. someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a child minder, teacher or youth worker although these are not exclusive categories.

Residence Orders and Supervision Orders do not confer 'looked after' status on a child, and so children subject to these Orders could not be in any form of 'looked after' Kinship Care placements.

Table 2 below details the numbers of looked after children subject to Care Orders at 31 March each year from 2009 to 2011, by HSC Trust. These figures are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 2

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	389	390	395
Northern	359	355	372
South Eastern	265	279	281
Southern	257	291	304

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Western	297	294	245
Northern Ireland	**1270**	**1609**	**1597**

Source: HSC Board Delegated Statutory Functions end of year Monitoring Returns.

Care Orders includes Interim and Deemed Care Orders.

Data Western Trust for 2009 sourced from LA1 Children Order Community Return

Kinship Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children who have lived in Kinship Care in each of the last three years were subject to (i) Care Orders; (ii) Residence Orders; and (iii) Supervision Orders, broken down by (a) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (b) constituency.

(AQW 4088/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally relating to how many children have lived in Kinship Care or short-term (3 months or less) Kinship Care in each of the last three years. The nearest available figures to those you have requested are detailed below for your information.

The numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements at 31 March each year from 2009 to 2011, by Health and Social Care Trust, are detailed in Table 1. Aggregation of the numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements, at 31 March 2011, by those living with grandparents, siblings or other Kinship Carers' requires an extensive clerical exercise and could only be provided at disproportionate costs. The figures reported in Table 1 are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 1

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	151	208	206
Northern	N/A	102	166
South Eastern	144	157	165
Southern	109	99	104
Western	63	52	76
Northern Ireland	**467**	**618**	**717**

Source: HSC Board end of year Corporate Parenting Reports.

Data are Not Available for the Northern Trust for 2009.

My Department has recently consulted on Guidance on the Assessment and Support of Kinship Foster Carers', the aims of which are to ensure a regional approach by Trusts to the assessment and support of Kinship Carers' which recognises their unique situation whilst safeguarding the child. For the purposes of the guide 'Kinship Carers" means relatives (as defined in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 Article 2.2 refers) and friends who are caring for a child or young person full time. Friends may include other people with a prior connection to the child e.g. someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a child minder, teacher or youth worker although these are not exclusive categories.

Residence Orders and Supervision Orders do not confer 'looked after' status on a child, and so children subject to these Orders could not be in any form of 'looked after' Kinship Care placements.

Table 2 below details the numbers of looked after children subject to Care Orders at 31 March each year from 2009 to 2011, by HSC Trust. These figures are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 2

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	389	390	395
Northern	359	355	372
South Eastern	265	279	281
Southern	257	291	304
Western	297	294	245
Northern Ireland	**1270**	**1609**	**1597**

Source: HSC Board Delegated Statutory Functions end of year Monitoring Returns.

Care Orders includes Interim and Deemed Care Orders.

Data Western Trust for 2009 sourced from LA1 Children Order Community Return

Children in Care: Cost of Providing Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total cost of providing services to children in (i) Residential Care; (ii) Foster Care; and (iii) Kinship Care in each of the last three years, broken down by (a) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (b) constituency.

(AQW 4091/11-15)

Mr Poots: The total costs of providing services to children in (i) Residential Care and (ii) Foster Care, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last three years, are set out in the tables below.

Children's Residential Care Costs	**2010/11**	**2009/10**	**2008/09**
HSC Trust	**Costs £m**	**Costs £m**	**Costs £m**
Belfast HSC Trust	5.6	5.4	5.0
Northern HSC Trust	4.1	4.5	4.6
South Eastern HSC Trust	3.7	4.5	3.8
Western HSC Trust	6.0	6.3	6.3
Southern HSC Trust	6.3	5.9	6.1
Total	**25.7**	**26.6**	**25.8**

Foster Care Costs (inc Kinship Costs)	**2010/11**	**2009/10**	**2008/09**
HSC Trust	**Costs £m**	**Costs £m**	**Costs £m**
Belfast HSC Trust	7.8	8.1	6.8
Northern HSC Trust	6.7	6.9	6.5
South Eastern HSC Trust	6.0	5.2	4.7

Foster Care Costs (inc Kinship Costs)	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09
HSC Trust	**Costs £m**	**Costs £m**	**Costs £m**
Western HSC Trust	4.4	4.4	3.7
Southern HSC Trust	4.6	4.4	4.0
Total	**29.5**	**29.0**	**25.7**

Costs for Kinship Care are included in Foster Care costs, as it is only possible to separately identify these at disproportionate cost. This Department does not track monies by Parliamentary Constituency area and it is not therefore possible to break down costs by constituency.

Kinship Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children in each of the last three years have lived in short-term (3 months or less) Kinship Care, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) constituency.

(AQW 4092/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally relating to how many children have lived in Kinship Care or short-term (3 months or less) Kinship Care in each of the last three years. The nearest available figures to those you have requested are detailed below for your information.

The numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements at 31 March each year from 2009 to 2011, by Health and Social Care Trust, are detailed in Table 1. Aggregation of the numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements, at 31 March 2011, by those living with grandparents, siblings or other Kinship Carers' requires an extensive clerical exercise and could only be provided at disproportionate costs. The figures reported in Table 1 are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 1

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	151	208	206
Northern	N/A	102	166
South Eastern	144	157	165
Southern	109	99	104
Western	63	52	76
Northern Ireland	**467**	**618**	**717**

Source: HSC Board end of year Corporate Parenting Reports.

Data are Not Available for the Northern Trust for 2009.

My Department has recently consulted on Guidance on the Assessment and Support of Kinship Foster Carers', the aims of which are to ensure a regional approach by Trusts to the assessment and support of Kinship Carers' which recognises their unique situation whilst safeguarding the child. For the purposes of the guide 'Kinship Carers" means relatives (as defined in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 Article 2.2 refers) and friends who are caring for a child or young person full time. Friends may include other people with a prior connection to the child e.g. someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a child minder, teacher or youth worker although these are not exclusive categories.

Residence Orders and Supervision Orders do not confer 'looked after' status on a child, and so children subject to these Orders could not be in any form of 'looked after' Kinship Care placements.

Table 2 below details the numbers of looked after children subject to Care Orders at 31 March each year from 2009 to 2011, by HSC Trust. These figures are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 2

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	389	390	395
Northern	359	355	372
South Eastern	265	279	281
Southern	257	291	304
Western	297	294	245
Northern Ireland	**1270**	**1609**	**1597**

Source: HSC Board Delegated Statutory Functions end of year Monitoring Returns.

Care Orders includes Interim and Deemed Care Orders.

Data Western Trust for 2009 sourced from LA1 Children Order Community Return

2001 Munby Ruling

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the 2001 Munby Ruling is currently being adhered to by each Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) how many complaints have been made about non-compliance to the ruling in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4095/11-15)

Mr Poots: All five Health and Social Care Trusts have indicated that they are complying with the 2001 Munby ruling. No complaints have been received by the Health and Social Care Trusts in relation to non compliance with the Munby ruling.

Intensive Care Units and Neo-natal Units: Staff

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of staff employed in (i) intensive care units; and (ii) neo-natal units between 1 April 2009 and 1 October 2009, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4121/11-15)

Mr Poots: Trusts record staff information on a live administrative system from which they extract snapshots of data at particular points in time. Therefore it has not been possible to provide cumulative staffing figures for April 2009-October 2009 or from April 2009 to present day.

Instead, snap-shot figures of staffing levels as at 1 April 2009, 2010 and 2011 have been provided.

All staff employed in both the Intensive Care and Neo Natal Units are trained to meet the requirements of their post and grade. Qualified nursing staff are Band 5 and above.

The number of medical and nursing staff employed within intensive care units and neo-natal units is given in the tables below. It should be noted that these units are supported by other staff members, including allied health professions, scientific/technical, administration and support services staff.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT BELFAST HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nurse Support Bands 2 & 3	19	15.98	15	13.12	16	13.92
Nurse Band 5	219	178.04	216	181.13	209	175.54
Nurse Band 6	21	18.90	21	18.24	21	18.17
Nurse Bands 7 & 8	16	15.34	14	13.14	13	12.34
Consultants	-	-	-	-	44	43.67

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent
2. Consultant job plans for 2011 have a split between Intensive Care and Operating Theatres and are therefore included, although only a proportion of their time will be spent in Intensive Care.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT BELFAST HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nursing / Midwifery Support Bands 2 & 4	11	9.30	9	6.94	7	5.73
Nursing / Midwifery Band 5	14	13.27	21	19.59	24	22.01
Nursing / Midwifery Band 6	53	44.56	60	49.70	54	42.42
Nursing / Midwifery Bands 7 & 8	15	13.90	14	13.60	13	12.60
Consultants	6	6.00	6	6.00	6	6.00

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE=Whole-time equivalent

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT NORTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nurse Support Band 2	7	6.26	7	6.26	5	4.72
Nurse Band 5	72	59.41	70	61.30	70	62.13
Nurse Band 6	7	6.20	7	6.20	8	7.20

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nurse Band 7	3	3.00	3	3.00	3	3.00

Source: Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent
2. The Intensive Care Unit has designated cover provided by Consultant Anaesthetists on a rotational basis 9am – 5pm Monday – Friday with on-call cover available outside these hours. The Intensive Care Unit also has designated Junior Doctor cover.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT NORTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nurse Support Bands 2 & 3	3	2.30	3	2.30	3	2.30
Nurse Band 5	31	28.44	31	28.44	31	28.44
Nurse Band 6	6	6.00	6	6.00	6	6.00
Nurse Bands 7 & 8	9	9.00	9	9.00	9	9.00
Consultants	3	1.20	3	1.20	3	1.20
Associate Specialist / Specialist Registrar	2	0.80	2	0.80	2	0.80

Source: Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent
2. The Neo Natal Unit also has on-call cover from another 5 Consultant Paediatricians and 8 Specialist Registrars.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT SOUTH EASTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nurse Support Bands 2 & 3	n/a	5.44	n/a	4.40	n/a	4.40
Nurse Band 5	n/a	44.07	n/a	41.23	n/a	44.59
Nurse Band 6	n/a	7.63	n/a	4.55	n/a	5.05
Nurse Band 7	n/a	2.93	n/a	2.93	n/a	2.93

Source: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent, n/a = not available in the timescale provided.

2. In addition, one consultant works in Intensive Care between the hours of 8am and 5.30pm, with on-call cover outside these hours.

3. There is 24/7 cover provided by a Specialist Registrar with airway skills in Theatres / Intensive Care.

4. There are also 3 Junior Doctors providing medical cover during core hours and one outside these hours.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT SOUTH EASTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nursing / Midwifery Support Bands 2 & 3	7	7.89	6	6.00	5	4.20
Nursing / Midwifery Band 5	20	15.92	16	14.86	15	14.06
Nursing / Midwifery Band 6	18	13.22	19	12.88	17	12.79
Nursing / Midwifery Band 7	5	5.44	6	5.44	6	5.64

Source: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent

2. Information on medical staff cover for Neo Natal units in the South Eastern Trust could not be provided within the specified timescale.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nurse Support Band 2	4	3.40	4	3.40	2	1.60
Nurse Band 5	58	49.22	60	49.32	45	38.90
Nurse Band 6	7	5.37	7	5.37	23	16.63
Nurse Bands 7 & 8	3	2.93	3	2.93	4	3.93

Source: Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nursing / Midwifery Support Bands 2 & 3	6	4.31	5	3.75	12	10.25

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nursing / Midwifery Band 5	33	24.72	44	34.81	45	35.89
Nursing / Midwifery Band 6	16	12.01	10	6.73	16	11.22
Nursing / Midwifery Bands 7 & 8	4	3.64	8	7.36	8	7.49
Consultants	2	2.00	5	5.00	5	5.00
Other Medical	10	9.00	16	11.30	13	9.60

Source: Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent
2. The Neo Natal Unit also has on-call cover from other medical staff.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT WESTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nurse Support Bands 2 & 3	11	9.97	11	9.97	11	9.97
Nurse Band 5	44	40.02	48	52.39	51	48.43
Nurse Band 6	54	44.60	56	47.51	56	45.95
Nurse Bands 7 & 8	3	3.00	6	5.86	6	5.86

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent
2. Information on medical staff cover for Intensive Care Units in the Western Trust could not be provided within the specified timescale.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT WESTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nursing / Midwifery Support Bands 2 & 3	12	9.64	12	9.64	11	8.64
Nursing / Midwifery Band 5	19	17.42	20	18.44	19	17.44
Nursing / Midwifery Band 6	22	16.69	18	14.41	18	14.41

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nursing / Midwifery Band 7	10	9.19	7	6.44	7	6.44

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent
2. The Neo Natal Unit also has on-call cover from other medical staff.

Intensive Care Units and Neo-natal Units: Staff

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number and grade of staff employed in (a) intensive care units; and (b) neo-natal units since 1 April 2009, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) how many of the staff were or are fully trained.

(AQW 4122/11-15)

Mr Poots: Trusts record staff information on a live administrative system from which they extract snapshots of data at particular points in time. Therefore it has not been possible to provide cumulative staffing figures for April 2009-October 2009 or from April 2009 to present day.

Instead, snap-shot figures of staffing levels as at 1 April 2009, 2010 and 2011 have been provided.

All staff employed in both the Intensive Care and Neo Natal Units are trained to meet the requirements of their post and grade. Qualified nursing staff are Band 5 and above.

The number of medical and nursing staff employed within intensive care units and neo-natal units is given in the tables below. It should be noted that these units are supported by other staff members, including allied health professions, scientific/technical, administration and support services staff.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT BELFAST HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nurse Support Bands 2 & 3	19	15.98	15	13.12	16	13.92
Nurse Band 5	219	178.04	216	181.13	209	175.54
Nurse Band 6	21	18.90	21	18.24	21	18.17
Nurse Bands 7 & 8	16	15.34	14	13.14	13	12.34
Consultants	-	-	-	-	44	43.67

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

3. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent
4. Consultant job plans for 2011 have a split between Intensive Care and Operating Theatres and are therefore included, although only a proportion of their time will be spent in Intensive Care.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT BELFAST HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nursing / Midwifery Support Bands 2 & 4	11	9.30	9	6.94	7	5.73
Nursing / Midwifery Band 5	14	13.27	21	19.59	24	22.01
Nursing / Midwifery Band 6	53	44.56	60	49.70	54	42.42
Nursing / Midwifery Bands 7 & 8	15	13.90	14	13.60	13	12.60
Consultants	6	6.00	6	6.00	6	6.00

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

2. HC = Headcount, WTE=Whole-time equivalent

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT NORTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nurse Support Band 2	7	6.26	7	6.26	5	4.72
Nurse Band 5	72	59.41	70	61.30	70	62.13
Nurse Band 6	7	6.20	7	6.20	8	7.20
Nurse Band 7	3	3.00	3	3.00	3	3.00

Source: Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

3. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent

4. The Intensive Care Unit has designated cover provided by Consultant Anaesthetists on a rotational basis 9am – 5pm Monday – Friday with on-call cover available outside these hours. The Intensive Care Unit also has designated Junior Doctor cover.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT NORTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nurse Support Bands 2 & 3	3	2.30	3	2.30	3	2.30
Nurse Band 5	31	28.44	31	28.44	31	28.44
Nurse Band 6	6	6.00	6	6.00	6	6.00

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nurse Bands 7 & 8	9	9.00	9	9.00	9	9.00
Consultants	3	1.20	3	1.20	3	1.20
Associate Specialist / Specialist Registrar	2	0.80	2	0.80	2	0.80

Source: Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

3. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent
4. The Neo Natal Unit also has on-call cover from another 5 Consultant Paediatricians and 8 Specialist Registrars.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT SOUTH EASTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nurse Support Bands 2 & 3	n/a	5.44	n/a	4.40	n/a	4.40
Nurse Band 5	n/a	44.07	n/a	41.23	n/a	44.59
Nurse Band 6	n/a	7.63	n/a	4.55	n/a	5.05
Nurse Band 7	n/a	2.93	n/a	2.93	n/a	2.93

Source: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

5. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent, n/a = not available in the timescale provided.
6. In addition, one consultant works in Intensive Care between the hours of 8am and 5.30pm, with on-call cover outside these hours.
7. There is 24/7 cover provided by a Specialist Registrar with airway skills in Theatres / Intensive Care.
8. There are also 3 Junior Doctors providing medical cover during core hours and one outside these hours.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT SOUTH EASTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nursing / Midwifery Support Bands 2 & 3	7	7.89	6	6.00	5	4.20
Nursing / Midwifery Band 5	20	15.92	16	14.86	15	14.06
Nursing / Midwifery Band 6	18	13.22	19	12.88	17	12.79

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nursing / Midwifery Band 7	5	5.44	6	5.44	6	5.64

Source: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

3. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent

4. Information on medical staff cover for Neo Natal units in the South Eastern Trust could not be provided within the specified timescale.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nurse Support Band 2	4	3.40	4	3.40	2	1.60
Nurse Band 5	58	49.22	60	49.32	45	38.90
Nurse Band 6	7	5.37	7	5.37	23	16.63
Nurse Bands 7 & 8	3	2.93	3	2.93	4	3.93

Source: Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

2. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

Grade	2009		2010		2011	
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE
Nursing / Midwifery Support Bands 2 & 3	6	4.31	5	3.75	12	10.25
Nursing / Midwifery Band 5	33	24.72	44	34.81	45	35.89
Nursing / Midwifery Band 6	16	12.01	10	6.73	16	11.22
Nursing / Midwifery Bands 7 & 8	4	3.64	8	7.36	8	7.49
Consultants	2	2.00	5	5.00	5	5.00
Other Medical	10	9.00	16	11.30	13	9.60

Source: Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

3. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent

4. The Neo Natal Unit also has on-call cover from other medical staff.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS AT WESTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nurse Support Bands 2 & 3	11	9.97	11	9.97	11	9.97
Nurse Band 5	44	40.02	48	52.39	51	48.43
Nurse Band 6	54	44.60	56	47.51	56	45.95
Nurse Bands 7 & 8	3	3.00	6	5.86	6	5.86

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

3. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent

4. Information on medical staff cover for Intensive Care Units in the Western Trust could not be provided within the specified timescale.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NEO NATAL UNITS AT WESTERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST BY GRADE AS AT 1 APRIL

	2009		2010		2011	
Grade	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**	**HC**	**WTE**
Nursing / Midwifery Support Bands 2 & 3	12	9.64	12	9.64	11	8.64
Nursing / Midwifery Band 5	19	17.42	20	18.44	19	17.44
Nursing / Midwifery Band 6	22	16.69	18	14.41	18	14.41
Nursing / Midwifery Band 7	10	9.19	7	6.44	7	6.44

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

3. HC = Headcount, WTE = Whole-time equivalent

4. The Neo Natal Unit also has on-call cover from other medical staff.

Smoking in Work Vehicles: Fines

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of fines issued for smoking in work vehicles since the introduction of the relevant legislation, broken down by council area.

(AQW 4162/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information held by the Department in relation to enforcement of the smoke-free legislation is not classified as fines. Rather, information is available on the number of written warnings, fixed penalty notices and prosecutions. In answer to the question asked, the most appropriate category would be fixed penalty notices. The table on the following page outlines the number of fixed penalty notices issued for smoking in a smoke-free vehicle for each financial year since the legislation was introduced on 30th April 2007.

FIXED PENALTY NOTICES ISSUED FOR SMOKING IN A SMOKE-FREE VEHICLE

	2007/08[1]	2008/09	2009/10	20010/11
Belfast	**38**	**160**	**244**	**205**
Eastern group	**-**	**66**	**298**	**241**
Ards	-	13	30	19
Castlereagh	-	13	57	32
Down	0	0	31	24
Lisburn	0	22	153	142
North Down	-	18	27	24
Northern group	**-**	**52**	**70**	**109**
Antrim	-	0	-	0
Ballymena	-	8	14	20
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0
Carrickfergus	-	7	6	0
Coleraine	0	-	14	33
Cookstown	0	0	0	0
Larne	11	11	-	13
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	-	8	8
Newtownabbey	-	16	21	35
Southern group	**33**	**161**	**169**	**202**
Armagh	-	15	31	53
Banbridge	9	17	5	7
Craigavon	17	64	64	46
Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	6	23	41
Newry & Mourne	-	59	46	55
Western group	**-**	**44**	**42**	**63**

	2007/08[1]	2008/09	2009/10	20010/11
Derry	0	7	-	35
Fermanagh	0	-	0	-
Limavady	0	-	-	-
Omagh	-	18	0	-
Strabane	-	14	23	21
Northern Ireland total	**96**	**483**	**823**	**820**

1 Smoke-free legislation was introduced in Northern Ireland on 30th April 2007, thus this is not a complete financial year.

2 Some cells have been masked (-) to hide counts of less than five and some (with cell counts of more than five) to prevent the value in another cell from being calculated; this is to ensure individuals cannot be identified.

Kinship Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children currently in Kinship Care who live with (i) their grandparents; (ii) their siblings; or (iii) other Kinship carers.

(AQW 4166/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally relating to how many children have lived in Kinship Care or short-term (3 months or less) Kinship Care in each of the last three years. The nearest available figures to those you have requested are detailed below for your information.

The numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements at 31 March each year from 2009 to 2011, by Health and Social Care Trust, are detailed in Table 1. Aggregation of the numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements, at 31 March 2011, by those living with grandparents, siblings or other Kinship Carers' requires an extensive clerical exercise and could only be provided at disproportionate costs. The figures reported in Table 1 are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 1

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	151	208	206
Northern	N/A	102	166
South Eastern	144	157	165
Southern	109	99	104
Western	63	52	76
Northern Ireland	**467**	**618**	**717**

Source: HSC Board end of year Corporate Parenting Reports.
Data are Not Available for the Northern Trust for 2009.

My Department has recently consulted on Guidance on the Assessment and Support of Kinship Foster Carers', the aims of which are to ensure a regional approach by Trusts to the assessment and support of Kinship Carers' which recognises their unique situation whilst safeguarding the child. For the purposes of the guide 'Kinship Carers" means relatives (as defined in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 Article 2.2 refers) and friends who are caring for a child or young person full time. Friends may include other people with a prior connection to the child e.g. someone who knows the child in a

more professional capacity such as a child minder, teacher or youth worker although these are not exclusive categories.

Residence Orders and Supervision Orders do not confer 'looked after' status on a child, and so children subject to these Orders could not be in any form of 'looked after' Kinship Care placements.

Table 2 below details the numbers of looked after children subject to Care Orders at 31 March each year from 2009 to 2011, by HSC Trust. These figures are not available by Parliamentary Constituency.

TABLE 2

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011
Belfast	389	390	395
Northern	359	355	372
South Eastern	265	279	281
Southern	257	291	304
Western	297	294	245
Northern Ireland	**1270**	**1609**	**1597**

Source: HSC Board Delegated Statutory Functions end of year Monitoring Returns.
Care Orders includes Interim and Deemed Care Orders.
Data Western Trust for 2009 sourced from LA1 Children Order Community Return

Kinship Carers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Kinship carers received training in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4167/11-15)

Mr Poots:

STATISTICS PROVIDED BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUSTS*

Trust	2009		2010		2011	
	Foster Carers	Kinship Carers	Foster Carers	Kinship Carers	Foster Carers	Kinship Carers
Belfast	83	31	180	22	99	2
South Eastern	94	13	121	11	135	10
Northern	154	21	177	23	209	46
Southern**		193		162		91
Western	447	60	400	78	350	95

* This table does not include training available on a regional basis to all carers, including kinship carers.

** The Southern Health and Social Care Trust does not collate statistics separately for foster carer and kinship carer training unless the course is specifically aimed at kinship carers. In 2009 and 2010, 16 kinship carers (8 in 2009 and 8 in 2010) availed of specific regional training.

Health and Social Care Trusts ensures that all foster carers/kinship foster carers are offered training in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child or young person placed in their care.

Foster Carers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many fosters carers received training in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4168/11-15)

Mr Poots:

STATISTICS PROVIDED BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUSTS*

Trust	2009		2010		2011	
	Foster Carers	Kinship Carers	Foster Carers	Kinship Carers	Foster Carers	Kinship Carers
Belfast	83	31	180	22	99	2
South Eastern	94	13	121	11	135	10
Northern	154	21	177	23	209	46
Southern**		193		162		91
Western	447	60	400	78	350	95

* This table does not include training available on a regional basis to all carers, including kinship carers.

** The Southern Health and Social Care Trust does not collate statistics separately for foster carer and kinship carer training unless the course is specifically aimed at kinship carers. In 2009 and 2010, 16 kinship carers (8 in 2009 and 8 in 2010) availed of specific regional training.

Health and Social Care Trusts ensures that all foster carers/kinship foster carers are offered training in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child or young person placed in their care.

Kinship Care Pupils: GCSEs

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average number of GCSE grades A-C obtained by pupils living in Kinship Care compared to pupils who are in the care of their parents, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4169/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally in the format you have requested. The nearest available figures are detailed in Table 1 below for your information.

Table 1 details the average number of GCSE grades A-C (including equivalents) obtained by looked after children in Kinship Care placements and in care for 12 months or longer at 30 September for the years detailed, compared with those obtained by pupils in the care of their parents.

TABLE1

Placement	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Kinship Care	2.0	2.6	2.5
With Parents	5.9	6.2	6.4

Sources: Kinship Care from Community Statistical return OC2, and With Parents data from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Knockmore Primary School

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the consultation that took place with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, prior to the draft consultation by the South Eastern Education and Library Board on closing Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn.

(AQW 4203/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Trust became aware of the South Eastern Education and Library Board's (SEELB) intention to go to consultation regarding the potential closure of the school when the Trust Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Manager met with SEELB to discuss the withdrawal of funding from the Speech and Language Development Project.

This was then confirmed at a meeting in the school on Monday 14th October 2011.

Foster Parents

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the criteria used by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to determine the suitability of prospective foster parents.

(AQW 4204/11-15)

Mr Poots: The criteria used by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to determine the suitability of prospective foster parents are those which apply to all HSC Trusts across Northern Ireland and are set out in:

- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- The Arrangement for Placement of Children (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Foster Placement (Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- Volume 3 of the Children (NI) Order 1995 Guidance and Regulations – Family Placements and Private Fostering – Chapters 4 and 5

Foster Care: Promotion

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the publications used by the Belfast Health and Social care Trust to promote foster care in (i) 2010; and (ii) 2011 to date.

(AQW 4207/11-15)

Mr Poots: The publications used by Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust to promote foster care in 2010 and in 2011 to date are those used by all HSC Trusts across Northern Ireland. Advertisements are routinely placed in: The Daily Mirror, Belfast & North West Telegraph, The Newsletter, The Irish News, Sunday Life; other regional newspapers, including the Andersonstown News, The Shankill Mirror, The South Belfast News; Belfast City Matters; NI4Kids; Northern Ireland Community Care Guide; The Fostering Issue; Ulster Tatler; GP & Community Healthcare; Options 4 Families – Schools 2010 booklet; Yell.com; and Farm Week – Balmoral show and the official show programme. Other initiatives to promote foster care include: the establishment of a Regional Fostering service in 2007; ongoing television and radio fostering campaigns; the establishment of the HSCNI website: www.fostering.hscni.net; Foster Care Fortnight, run by Fostering Network; and Public information campaigns at job fares, coffee mornings and advice forums.

Clinical Negligence: Claims

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of outstanding claims for clinical negligence; and (ii) the number and the cost of claims settled in each of the last five years, including legal fees, court costs and other associated costs.

(AQW 4221/11-15)

Mr Poots: In June 2010, my Department introduced a new data collection system to monitor clinical / social care negligence claims open during each year (1 April – 31 March). With this in mind, it is not possible to provide the requested information for each of the last five years. However, information is available from this data collection system for the 2009/10 financial year, on (i) the number of clinical negligence claims open on 31 March 2010, and (ii) the number and cost of claims closed (including legal fees, court costs and other associated costs) during 2009/10.

(i) At 31st March 2010, 2,383 cases of clinical / social care negligence claims remained open across Health & Social Care (HSC) Trusts (including Northern Ireland Ambulance Service) in Northern Ireland; and,

(ii) During 2009/10, 448 cases of clinical / social care negligence were closed in Northern Ireland, of which, 124 were closed with payments (including damages and legal costs) totaling almost £8.9 million.

Kinship Care Arrangements

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number and percentage of children who are subject to a (i) Emergency Protection Order; (ii) Protection Order; (iii) Interim Care Order; or (iv) Care Order and who are cared for under (a) informal Kinship Care arrangements; (b) formal Kinship Care arrangements; and (c) non-Kinship Foster Care arrangements.

(AQW 4248/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally relating to the legal status of looked after children by Kinship Care arrangements, or Kinship Care placements in terms of percentages living with grandparents, siblings or other relatives. Obtaining these data requires an extensive clerical exercise, and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Table 1 below, details for your information, the numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements, and these figures expressed as a percentage of all of looked after children, as at 31 March 2011.

TABLE 1

Health and Social Care Trust	Looked After Children in Kinship Care Placements	Children in Kinship Care placements as percentage of all Looked After Children
Belfast	206	33%
Northern	166	29%
South Eastern	165	33%
Southern	104	26%
Western	76	19%
Total	**717**	**29%**

Source: HSC Board End of Year Delegated Statutory Functions Monitoring Returns

Kinship Care

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of children living in Kinship Care are being cared for by (i) grandparents; (ii) siblings; or (iii) other relatives.

(AQW 4249/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally relating to the legal status of looked after children by Kinship Care arrangements, or Kinship Care placements in terms of percentages living with

grandparents, siblings or other relatives. Obtaining these data requires an extensive clerical exercise, and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Table 1 below, details for your information, the numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements, and these figures expressed as a percentage of all of looked after children, as at 31 March 2011.

TABLE 1

Health and Social Care Trust	Looked After Children in Kinship Care Placements	Children in Kinship Care placements as percentage of all Looked After Children
Belfast	206	33%
Northern	166	29%
South Eastern	165	33%
Southern	104	26%
Western	76	19%
Total	**717**	**29%**

Source: HSC Board End of Year Delegated Statutory Functions Monitoring Returns

Kinship Carers

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what standards are required to be met before an individual or family can be recognised as Kinship carers.

(AQW 4250/11-15)

Mr Poots: As its paramount consideration, the duty of a Trust must be to safeguard the welfare of the child. To this end a thorough assessment of the carer/kinship carer must be carried out to ensure their ability to meet the child's full need for stability and permanence.

To underpin this, work is near completion on the development of Standards and Guidance on the Assessment and Support of Kinship Foster Carers in Northern Ireland. It is intended that the standards will be published early in 2012.

In relation to foster Carers, we currently apply the UK National Standards for Foster Care together with the Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers.

Children in Care

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what research has been carried out to assess the cost differential of a child being placed in care and a child being placed with a Kinship carer.

(AQW 4251/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is no differential between the amounts paid to kinship and non-kinship (stranger) foster carers with whom children are placed by Health and Social Care Trust. Both groups receive exactly the same allowances. It is known that it costs more to place children in residential care than in any form of foster care. We also know that the majority of children who are 'looked after' are in foster care. Consequently, it is difficult to see the benefit of research in this area.

Kinship Care

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how many children currently live in Kinship Care; and (ii) what is this figure as a percentage of all children.

(AQW 4252/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available centrally relating to the legal status of looked after children by Kinship Care arrangements, or Kinship Care placements in terms of percentages living with grandparents, siblings or other relatives. Obtaining these data requires an extensive clerical exercise, and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Table 1 below, details for your information, the numbers of looked after children in Kinship Care placements, and these figures expressed as a percentage of all of looked after children, as at 31 March 2011.

TABLE 1

Health and Social Care Trust	Looked After Children in Kinship Care Placements	Children in Kinship Care placements as percentage of all Looked After Children
Belfast	206	33%
Northern	166	29%
South Eastern	165	33%
Southern	104	26%
Western	76	19%
Total	**717**	**29%**

Source: HSC Board End of Year Delegated Statutory Functions Monitoring Returns

Stroke Units

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of patients spent 90 percent or more of their time in hospital in a Stroke Unit in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4264/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not readily available on the percentage of patients who spent 90 percent or more of their time in hospital in a Stroke Unit, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Royal College of Physicians' National Sentinel Stroke Audit 2010: Public Report

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Royal College of Physicians' 'National Sentinel Stroke Audit 2010 - public report' was the last of its kind, what arrangements are in place to ensure that the data continues to be collected to allow the stoke services provided to be benchmarked in Northern Ireland against the services that are provided in Britain.

(AQW 4267/11-15)

Mr Poots: At present the Health and Social Care Board is collecting relevant stroke data using the hospital Patient Administration System (PAS). However my Department has recently approved a HSC Board business case for a regional ICT stroke information system. I am advised that the planned information system, once implemented, will allow for the collection, on an ongoing basis, of more detailed monitoring of the quality of stroke care provided. This planned information system will also link with UK national audits in stroke care such as the Stroke Information National Audit Programme (SINAP) therefore allowing for benchmarking of stroke services in Northern Ireland with those in GB.

Speech and Language Therapy: Waiting List

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people on the waiting list for speech and language therapy in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 4298/11-15)

Mr Poots: Table (a) below details the number of people awaiting an appointment with a speech and language therapist, by aggregated time bands, from the date of referral to treatment, at 31st October 2011.

TABLE (A) NUMBER OF PEOPLE AWAITING AN APPOINTMENT WITH A SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST AT 31ST OCTOBER 2011[1]

	Waiting time from referral to treatment for Speech and Language Therapy (by weeks waiting)					
HSC Trust	**0-3**	**>3 to 6**	**>6 to 9**	**>9 to 13**	**>13**	**Total**
Belfast	244	153	152	112	148	809
Northern	212	149	59	0	0	420
South Eastern	188	134	59	12	8	401
Southern	174	144	87	51	4	460
Western	136	130	61	51	27	405
Northern Ireland	954	710	418	226	187	2,495

1 Figures detailed in reply to this question were provided on request by the HSCB and have not been validated by the DHSSPS.

Speech and Language Therapists

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of speech and language therapists employed by each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4299/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of speech and language therapists employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care broken down by Health and Social Care Trust is given in the table below.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPISTS WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE BY TRUST AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER 2011

Trust	**HC**	**WTE**
Belfast	120	94.58
Northern	115	94.64
South Eastern	77	64.04
Southern	71	59.26
Western	62	55.44
Total	**445**	**367.96**

Source: Human Resources Management System

Notes:

5. HC = Headcount

6. WTE = Whole-time Equivalent

7. The figures above will include some senior managers who are speech and language therapists but are working in an administrative role.

Marmot Review

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his Department's assessment of the six policy objectives and related priority objectives in the Marmot Review- Fair Society, Healthy Lives.

(AQW 4302/11-15)

Mr Poots: A review of the current public health strategy for Northern Ireland Investing for Health, completed last year, concluded that there is a need for a strategy based on the principles of Investing for Health but updated to take account of social, economic and legislative changes as well as new evidence and data available.

The process for development of a new public health strategic framework has begun, and, in respect of what has been shown to be effective, particular notice will be taken of the Marmot Review.

Caring for Patients with Pregnancy Loss

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what resources and training are provided for health professionals to promote sensitive practice in caring for patients with pregnancy loss, both during and after miscarriage.

(AQW 4303/11-15)

Mr Poots: All Obstetric and Gynaecology doctors undergo training relating to breaking bad news, early pregnancy problems and miscarriage. All midwives also receive training in bereavement care. In addition, the South-Eastern Trust has a dedicated bereavement midwife.

The "Careplan for women who experience a miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death", issued by the Department in 2004, provides principles of good practice and guidance for the loss of a pregnancy at various stages, stillbirth or loss of a neonate. In addition, it promotes a sensitive patient-focused approach and facilitates Trusts in producing locally appropriate information and guidance to supplement the careplan

I also recently launched a draft maternity strategy for public consultation, which complements the current guidance and promotes support for women suffering the loss of a baby. The draft strategy is out for consultation until 23 December; I would encourage everyone with an interest in maternity services to respond to the consultation.

Psychologists: Qualified and Trainee

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) qualified psychologists; and (ii) trainee psychologists in Northern Ireland that his Department is aware of at present.

(AQW 4340/11-15)

Mr Poots: As at 30 September 2011, there were 215 (192.92 whole-time equivalent) clinical psychologists as well as 51 (50.06 whole-time equivalent) trainee psychologists employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Source: Human Resources Management System).

Air Travel: Costs

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total cost incurred by his Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from

January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.

(AQW 4344/11-15)

Mr Poots: The travel costs incurred by my Department on air travel between Northern Ireland and Great Britain from January to December 2010 are as follows:

(i)	Between Northern Ireland and Heathrow airport	£70,645
(ii)	Between Northern Ireland and other airports in Great Britain	£63,273

Kinship Care: Children in

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children in Kinship care were living in (i) residential care; and (ii) foster care prior to living with extended family members in each of the last three years, broken down by (a) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (b) constituency.

(AQW 4385/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information you have requested is not available centrally, and could only be obtained by Health and Social Care Trust area at disproportionate costs.

Kinship Care Arrangements

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of placement breakdowns in Kinship Care arrangements in the last three years, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) constituency.

(AQW 4386/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information you have requested is not available centrally, and could only be obtained by Health and Social Care Trust area at disproportionate costs.

Kinship Care Foster Assessments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Kinship Care foster assessments have been completed in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) constituency.

(AQW 4387/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information you have requested is not available centrally, and could only be obtained by Health and Social Care Trust area at disproportionate costs.

Kinship Care

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of children currently in Kinship Care are (i) male; and (ii) female.

(AQW 4401/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest figures available indicate that of the 717 looked after children in Kinship Care placements at 31 March 2011, 47% were male, and 53% were female.

Ambulance Based in Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any plans to withdraw the ambulance which is based in Ballycastle.

(AQW 4421/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has confirmed that there are no plans to withdraw the ambulance based in Ballycastle, or change the current ambulance provision there.

Ambulance Provision in Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any proposals being considered to change the current ambulance provision in Ballycastle.

(AQW 4423/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has confirmed that there are no plans to withdraw the ambulance based in Ballycastle, or change the current ambulance provision there.

Foster Carers

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the standards that are required to be met before an individual or family can be recognised as foster carers.

(AQW 4428/11-15)

Mr Poots: As its paramount consideration, the duty of a Trust must be to safeguard the welfare of the child. To this end a thorough assessment of the carer/kinship carer must be carried out to ensure their ability to meet the child's full need for stability and permanence.

To underpin this, work is near completion on the development of Standards and Guidance on the Assessment and Support of Kinship Foster Carers in Northern Ireland. It is intended that the standards will be published early in 2012.

In relation to foster Carers, we currently apply the UK National Standards for Foster Care together with the Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers.

Meals on Wheels Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many households in the North Down area are currently receiving the Meals on Wheels Service.

(AQW 4453/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of households in the North Down area currently receiving the Meals on Wheels service. However, information is available on the number of persons receiving a Meals on Wheels service in each HSC Trust at year end 31 March.

At 31st March 2011, 573 persons were in receipt of a Meals on Wheels service in the South Eastern HSC Trust. The information cannot be disaggregated by geographical areas smaller than HSC Trust. This information is provisional and is due to be published in 'Adult Community Statistics for Northern Ireland 2010-2011' in December 2011.

Department of Justice

Conditional Discharges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3531/11-15, how many of the Conditional Discharges imposed were breached and resulted in an alternative or additional sentence.

(AQW 4026/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The information requested is not available. Data on convictions and reoffending are not structured in a way that would allow the member's specific question to be answered.

Prostitution in Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Justice what action he is taking to address the level of prostitution in Fermanagh.

(AQW 4027/11-15)

Mr Ford: As part of the Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour, the Department of Justice published a research paper in January 2011, on women involved in prostitution and human trafficking in Northern Ireland, which is available at:

http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/publications/research_paper_investigating_the_issues_for_women_in_northern_ireland_involved_in_prostitution_andexploring_best_practice_elsewhere.htm

As part of this initiative the Department hosted a conferenceon women involved in prostitution in September, bringing together key individuals from across Northern Ireland and neighbouring jurisdictions. The conference focused on four key themes:

- Preventing people from entering prostitution;
- Tackling demand for those involved in prostitution;
- Helping those involved in prostitution who want to exit to do so and providing support to those who do not wish to exit; and
- Eliminating trafficking for sexual exploitation.

We are now working with our partners to develop a suite of proposals to address the issue of prostitution across Northern Ireland.

Any enforcement actionin local communities, such as Fermanagh, is an operational matter for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Legal Aid: Cost

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of legal aid, to date, for the defendants in cases (i) 11/001272; and (ii) 11/007222; and why these cases were dismissed at Dungannon Magistrates Court.

(AQW 4029/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost of legal aid paid to date in respect of the above cases is set out in the table below along with an estimate of the likely cost of the preliminary inquiries:

	Advice provided at police station	Preliminary Enquiry Stage	Total	Case Status
Case 1	£130.86	£984.00 (estimate)	£1114.86	Case ongoing
Case 2	£168.13	£1652.75 (estimate)	£1820.88	Case dismissed
Total	£298.99	£2636.75 (estimate)	£2935.74	

No claims for payment have been received in respect of the proceedings at the Magistrates' Court for either of the defendants and therefore an estimate of the fees in each case has been provided.

Case number 11/001272 has not been dismissed and the defendant in these proceedings is currently on remand on bail before Dungannon Magistrates' Court.

Regarding case number 11/007222, the Public Prosecution Service and the judiciary operate independently from Government and do not fall within my Ministerial portfolio. I am therefore not in a position to comment on prosecutorial or judicial decisions taken in individual cases.

Prison Population

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the current population of each prison; and the average prison population of each prison in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4031/11-15)

Mr Ford: The current prison population of each prison and the average prison population in each of the last five years are set out in the table below.

Population	Current	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Maghaberry	995	770	826	833	813	773
Magilligan	516	465	413	440	413	409
Hydebank Wood (Male)	230	183	182	186	193	198
(Female)	61	42	49	47	43	39

* Current population as of 15/11/2011

Level of Force that a Householder can use against an Intruder

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Justice to outline the current position in respect of the level of force that a householder can use against an intruder compared to that in the position in the rest of the UK.

(AQW 4049/11-15)

Mr Ford: Further to my answer to AQW/3046/11 the common law defence of self-defence applies in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The clarification of the common law offence made by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 extends to England and Wales and Northern Ireland but not to Scotland.In each jurisdiction every case is considered taking account of its own facts and circumstances to ascertain whether a crime has been committed. Whether it is in the public interest to raise criminal proceedings is a matter for the independent prosecuting authorities.

R v Haddock & Others

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, in regard to the provision of an additional court room facility in the case of R-v-Haddock & Others, (i) how much has this facility cost to date and how much it is likely to cost; (ii) how often has it been used; and (iii) for his assessment of whether the use of this facility represents value for money.

(AQW 4060/11-15)

Mr Ford: The additional courtroom facility for viewing the case of R v Haddock and others has cost £34,563.54 up to 10 November 2011. This comprises £17,524.54 for equipment and staffing and estimated additional policing costs of £17,039. The facility was used 13 times before it was closed on 24 September 2011. If required it can be re-opened should demand increase.

I am satisfied that the expenditure incurred to provide these additional facilities was both appropriate and proportionate.

Colin Duffy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Republican separated prisoner, Colin Duffy, has personally signed the required compact.

(AQW 4063/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that republican separated prisoner Colin Duffy has personally signed the required compact.

EU Directive 2010/64

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice, given that criminal justice is devolved and that the UK government is opted-out of European Union law in areas of criminal justice but with the right to opt-in, for his assessment of whether the Executive should be the party to the EU Directive 2010/64 on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings in order to standardise the rights to a fair trial across the European Union under Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom.

(AQW 4117/11-15)

Mr Ford: The right to interpretation and translation is fundamental for a person facing a criminal charge who does not understand the language of the criminal proceedings.

In March 2010, the United Kingdom Government opted into a MemberState proposal to set minimum standards for the rights to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings. The proposal is available at:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0082:FIN:EN:DOC

In June 2010, I confirmed my agreement with a recommendation from the UK Justice Secretary for the UK to opt out of the proposed EU Directive 2010/64. The recommendation was made on the basis that the MemberState proposal already guaranteed similar levels of protection to defendants' rights and, in addition, was at a more advanced stage of development.

The MemberState proposal was adopted by the EU Parliament on 20 October 2010. My officials continue to work closely with Whitehall colleagues to ensure implementation of this Directive.

Bench Warrants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3013/11-15, how many of the people subject to a bench or arrest warrant were, or are, remanded on bail.

(AQW 4130/11-15)

Mr Ford: Pursuant to my answer to AQW3013/11-15, the following table details the number of Arrest and Bench Warrants issued where a defendant was on bail.

The warrants detailed in the table relate to 3232 defendants, but it is not possible to disaggregate these by County Court Division as defendants may have more than one warrant issued against them and in more than one County Court Division.

TABLE:

County Court Division	Issued Less Than 1 Year ago	Issued More Than 1 Year ago	All Warrants
Antrim	41	288	329
Ards	26	190	216
Armagh And South Down	54	470	524

County Court Division	Issued Less Than 1 Year ago	Issued More Than 1 Year ago	All Warrants
Belfast	207	1307	1514
Craigavon	53	419	472
Fermanagh And Tyrone	70	477	547
Londonderry	51	188	239
Total	**502**	**3339**	**3841**

Notes:

A Bench or Arrest Warrant may also be issued other than where a defendant fails to answer bail such as failing to appear in response to a summons. These types ofcaseshave not been included in the table.

Ilex Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked Minister of Justice, with regard to Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from his current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.

(AQW 4140/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department currently makes a significant financial investment in all Council areas, including Derry, via funding for Community Safety Partnerships and will do likewise for Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) when they are established. Whilst my Department and the Policing Board will set high level strategic objectives, PCSPs will be expected to address local priorities and so it will be for the Partnership to consider alignment between policing and community safety priorities and the 'One Plan' in due course.

At present no funds, either directly from my Department, or indirectly from the Derry City Council's Community Safety Partnership budget have been committed to any of the projects contained in the 'One Plan'.

Sentence Tariffs: Changes at Westminster

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the recently announced changes in sentence tariffs at Westminster; and what consideration he is giving to introducing similar changes.

(AQW 4146/11-15)

Mr Ford: The proposals announced by the Justice Secretary on 26 October 2011are intended to address the significant difficulties created by the operation of the Indeterminate Public Protection (IPP) sentence in England and Wales. The Justice Secretary also proposes to introduce mandatory custodial sentences for aggravated knife possession. I understand this is in response to a Westminster report into gang and youth violence following this summer's riots in England and Wales.

Through the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 (the 2008 Order), Indeterminate Custodial Sentences (ICSs) are available to judges in Northern Ireland in order to protect the public. These are similar in nature to the IPP, though in practice the 2008 Order operates in a different way and we have not experienced the same problems with this type of sentence in our justice system. I am satisfied that the 2008 Order provides a framework of robust protections for the public.

In addition, the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 completes a programme started in the 2008 Order, delivering tough new knife crime sentences for Northern Ireland by doubling the available penalties for a wide range of offences involving knives. It is my assessment that these measures are a vigorous and effective response to this very serious issue.

At this stage, I have no plans to introduce similar proposals; however, I will continue to keep this area under review.

Oval Football Ground: Firework Attack

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the response of the PSNI to a firework attack during a football match at the Oval football ground in Belfast, in which two members of Glentoran Football Club's staff were injured.

(AQW 4161/11-15)

Mr Ford: The police response to this incident 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 Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Human Trafficking Legislation

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to introduce legislation on human trafficking, given that Northern Ireland is often a transit region for victims.

(AQW 4184/11-15)

Mr Ford: The principal offences relating to human trafficking are contained within the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The Department of Justice is working with the Home Office and the Scottish Government to consider legislative changes including those required to implement the European Union Directive on Human Trafficking. The Directive will come into force across the United Kingdom in 2013. Any legislative proposals will be brought to the Assembly.

EU Directive

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the Executive being the party of the proposed European Union Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of the victims of crime.

(AQW 4198/11-15)

Mr Ford: In August 2011, I confirmed my agreement with a recommendation from the UK Justice Secretary for the UK to opt into the Directive and. in doing so, signalled my support for the aims of the proposed Directive. These are to ensure that all victims of crime:-

- receive the appropriate protection and support,
- are able to participate in criminal proceedings, and
- are recognised and treated in a respectful, sensitive and professional manner without discrimination of any kind in all contacts with any public authority, victim support or restorative justice service.

The draft Directive is available at:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0275:FIN:EN:DOC

My officials will continue to work closely with Whitehall colleagues to ensure that the Northern Ireland perspective is firmly represented and considered in ongoing negotiations on the final text of the Directive with the European Commission and Parliament.

Elderly People: Crimes Against

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) number; and (ii) types of crimes committed against elderly people in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4334/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number and types of crimes committedagainst elderly people in each of the last three years 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.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice why provisions for alternative dispute resolution in the Small Claims Court differ from the provisions in the rest of the UK.

(AQW 4356/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Small Claims Mediation Scheme in EnglandandWalesis open to court users who have a defended small claim and offers an alternative method for resolving disputed small claims in order to reduce the number of cases going to court. In 2010 the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service (NICTS) evaluated the court based Scheme to assess what benefits it may provide ifintroduced in this jurisdiction.

NICTS concluded that a similar in-house mediation scheme for small claims in Northern Ireland would not provide value for money, although this will be kept under review.

Alternative Dispute Resolution is a recurring theme throughout the report of the Access to Justice Review, published in September. The report recommends greater use of mediation and other alternative dispute resolution. My department will consider the recommendations carefully together with the responses received to the report when the consultation period closes in December.

Absolute Discharge

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been dealt with by Absolute Discharge in each court division in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4439/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number of convictions dealt with by absolute discharge, by court division, for the calendar years 2004 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). Data for 2004 to 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE DISPOSED BY MEANS OF ABSOLUTE DISCHARGE BY COURT DIVISION 2004-2008

	Year				
Court division	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Antrim	17	29	23	14	33
Ards	20	16	9	13	14
Armagh and South Down	41	24	32	27	58
Belfast	67	47	38	45	32
Craigavon and Lisburn	11	8	8	11	11

Court division	Year				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Fermanagh and Tyrone	22	19	10	20	16
Londonderry	6	11	13	19	24
Total	184	154	133	149	188

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Prison Service

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what steps he will take to prevent any efforts to remove the Prison Service of its association with the Crown and references to Her Majesty.

(AQW 4509/11-15)

Mr Ford: No decisions have been taken in relation to removing from the Prison Service any association with the Crown or references to Her Majesty and there are currently no proposals on my desk in relation to this.

As such, I have not currently planned any steps or action, preventative or otherwise in relation to this matter.

NIPS is undergoing fundamental end to end reform and this is one of a range of issues which I would expect to be considered as part of that ongoing review. Any proposals which are deemed to be controversial will be subject to approval by the Executive.

Department for Regional Development

Unadopted Sewers and Pumping Stations

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) which areas in the Strangford constituency have had enforcement measures put in place to ensure that unadopted sewers and pumping stations, with outstanding agreements with NI Water, are brought up to the required standard for adoption; and (ii) the outcome or current status of these measures.

(AQW 3648/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the other party to any adoption agreement is required to provide security in the form of bond surety for the discharge by them of any obligations imposed by the agreement. NIW can call upon this bond security, should the person fail to meet the terms of the agreement. In such cases NIW would complete the work on the sewer or pumping station using the bond surety and adopt the sewerage system. Bond arrangements for agreements formerly with its predecessor Water Service, which transferred to NIW on 1 April 2007, are administered by my Department's Roads Service in conjunction with NIW.

Since the establishment of NIW on 1 April 2007, there have been no cases in the Strangford constituency where a developer has failed to meet the terms of an agreement.

Unadopted Sewers in the Strangford Constituency

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the unadopted sewers with an outstanding agreements with NI Water, or its predecessor, in the Strangford constituency.

(AQW 3652/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there are currently some 322 existing agreements in place in the Strangford constituency with persons constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system, to adopt the system at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met. This includes agreements formerly with its predecessor Water Service which transferred to NIW on 1 April 2007.

It is the responsibility of the persons constructing the sewerage system to advise NIW when they consider it is completed to a satisfactory standard, to enable the system to be inspected and a Certificate of Completion to be issued with a view to future adoption.

The information requested about unadopted sewers in the Strangford constituency is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Unadopted Sewers in the Strangford Constituency

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development which sewers in the Strangford constituency are to be adopted in the next six months.

(AQW 3670/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are currently some 322 existing agreements in place with persons constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system, to adopt the system at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met.

It is the responsibility of the persons constructing the sewerage system to advise NIW when they consider it is completed to a satisfactory standard, to enable the system to be inspected and a Certificate of Completion to be issued with a view to future adoption. NIW is currently working with a number of developers within the Strangford constituency to potentially adopt sewers and has issued 21 Preliminary Certificates of Completion which will allow the sewerage system to be adopted within 12 months of the date of issue, when a maintenance period has expired.

Unadopted Pumping Stations in the Strangford Constituency

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development which pumping stations in the Strangford constituency are to be adopted in the next six months.

(AQW 3671/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are currently no agreements in Strangford Constituency solely for pumping stations as they are normally processed as part of a sewerage system package including sewers within a development site. There are currently some 322 existing agreements in place with persons constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system, to adopt the system at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met.

It is the responsibility of the persons constructing the sewerage system to advise NIW when they consider it is completed to a satisfactory standard, to enable the system to be inspected and a Certificate of Completion to be issued with a view to future adoption. NIW is currently working with developers within the Strangford constituency to potentially adopt pumping stations in the following locations:

- Moatlands, Ballyhalbert
- Ardnavelly Park, Comber
- New Court, Portavogie
- Dunsy Way, Comber
- Off Main Street, Cloughey

Adopted Pumping Stations in the Strangford Constituency

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development which pumping stations in the Strangford constituency have been adopted in the last (i) twelve months; (ii) three years; and (iii) five years.

(AQW 3672/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that details of the sewage pumping stations adopted in the Strangford constituency during the past 5 years are detailed in the table below.

Year	Sewage Pumping Station
2007	None
2008	Ravara, Ballygowan The Moorings, Killyleagh Braeside, Newtownards Ballvally, Millisle Carnglave Manor, Ballynahinch Ringbuoy, Comber
2009	None
2010	Whitecherry Hill, Killinchy Long Island Drive, Kircubbin Westlands, Portavogie Greyabbey Road. Ballywalter
2011 (To date)	Fairgreen Court, Killyleagh

Traffic-calming Measures at the Blackskull Junction

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the provision of traffic calming measures at the Blackskull Junction in the Upper Bann Constituency.

(AQW 3976/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As indicated in my letter to you on 14 September 2011, I advised that Blackskull would be considered for the provision of a traffic calming scheme when future works programmes are being compiled.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that preparation of these programmes is dependent upon confirmation of the budget allocations for the incoming financial year. This process usually begins in April of each financial year.

Roads Service has further advised that the relative priority of schemes can change as new traffic calming assessments are made. Consequently, at this time, it is not possible to indicate which schemes will be brought forward for consultation or implementation in the 2012/13 works programme, however I will endeavour to keep you updated regarding this issue.

A5 Road Project

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the mechanism by which the £22m of funding will be returned to the A5 Road project; and the timescale in which it will happen.

(AQW 4015/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will be aware, the A5 scheme has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

The recent decision by the Irish Government will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme.

A5 Road Scheme: Funding

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the recent announcement by the Irish Government to postpone its funding for the A5 road scheme, whether he will review any future major road upgrading projects.

(AQW 4285/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the A5 scheme has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

The recent decision by the Irish Government will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme.

I am conscious that investment in roads infrastructure is an essential component in creating jobs and future prosperity. In the short term, it provides much needed jobs in the construction sector and in the longer term, particularly in the case of strategic road improvements, it facilitates the economic growth which is key to our future competitiveness.

A5 Road Scheme: Funding

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Regional Development what impact the decision by the Irish Government to postpone its funding for the A5 road scheme will have on the project and the construction company which was identified as the preferred bidder.

(AQW 4289/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the A5 scheme has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

The recent decision by the Irish Government will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme.

As I am sure you will appreciate, until this work is completed, I will not be in a position to advise you of the implications for the construction companies currently employed on the A5 project.

A5 Road Scheme: Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the recent announcement about the funding from the Irish Government for the A5 road scheme, (i) for his assessment of the proposed A5 scheme; and (ii) whether he intends to progress with the A26 road scheme ahead of schedule to relieve pressure on the construction industry.

(AQW 4354/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you are aware, the A5 scheme has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

Since the Irish Government has indicated it is unable to part fund the A5 and A8 projects as originally envisaged, this will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic

Roads Programme. In the meantime, development work on the A26 project will continue, with the aim of publishing the draft Orders and Environmental Statement in 2012.

I am conscious that investment in roads infrastructure is an essential component in creating jobs and future prosperity. In the short term, it provides much needed jobs in the construction sector and in the longer term, particularly in the case of strategic road improvements, it facilitates the economic growth which is key to our future competitiveness.

Gortcorbies Climbing Lane Project on the A37

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will seek additional funding for the Gortcorbies climbing lane project on the A37.

(AQW 4374/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Irish Government has indicated that it is unable to part-fund the A5 & A8, as originally envisaged, this will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme.

I am conscious that investment in roads infrastructure is an essential component in creating jobs and future prosperity. In the short term, it provides much needed jobs in the construction sector and in the longer term, particularly in the case of strategic road improvements, it facilitates the economic growth which is key to our future competitiveness.

A5 Project

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the reduced financial commitment to the A5 project, what plans he has to expedite the infrastructure development plans that are currently being considered by Roads Service in conjunction with Armagh City and District Council, to improve the traffic flow in and around Armagh city.

(AQW 4486/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you are aware the A5 scheme has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

Since the Irish Government has indicated it is unable to part fund the A5 and A8 projects as originally envisaged, this will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme.

I am conscious that investment in roads infrastructure is an essential component in creating jobs and future prosperity. In the short term, it provides much needed jobs in the construction sector and in the longer term, particularly in the case of strategic road improvements, it facilitates the economic growth which is key to our future competitiveness.

Park-and-ride Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken to prevent people, who are not using public transport services, from making use of park and ride facilities.

(AQO 742/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Research indicates the importance of Park and Ride in maximising modal shift away from the private car to public transport and achieving more sustainable means of travel. The Regional Transportation Strategy identifies the provision of Park and Ride and Park and Share facilities as a key element of a more integrated transport infrastructure for Northern Ireland which is more environmentally friendly.

Despite the economic downturn, 77 million passengers used public transport in the last financial year. Railway passengers have increased with a record 10.4 million railway passengers in 2010/11. This is the highest level recorded since 1967 and represents almost two thirds of customer growth since 2002.

Public Transport: Winter Services

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Regional Development what improvements and measures have been put in place since last year to ensure the adequate provision of public transport, especially in rural areas, in preparation for the anticipated harsh winter weather.

(AQO 743/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has completed a review of winter preparedness and resilience across the organisation, including rural areas, following the period of disruption last winter due to extreme weather.

The review undertaken looked at communications plans, fleet availability, staff resources, emergency cover and associated resource plans. An action plan was drawn up following last year's review and has been progressed.

Translink has also reviewed and updated its extreme weather procedures and reviewed the distribution of salt, de-icing and snow clearing products.

The provision of bus based transport depends upon the state of the roads generally. Roads Service has already carried out a significant amount of planning for this winter. I am confident that staffing arrangements have been put in place, including stand-by arrangements and that winter service equipment is in good working order. There is also an adequate stock of salt in place to ensure main roads are salted.

Home to school transport is an especially important issue in rural areas. Translink is contracted to provide school transport services by the education authorities and has given it priority.

Jackson's Corner, A27

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to improve the road layout at Jackson's Corner on the main A27 Portadown/Newry Road, to reduce the number of accidents and damage to residential property.

(AQO 744/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware of the lobbying from local councillors within Armagh City and District Council and I recently met with Councillor Robert Turner when we discussed this location.

I can also advise that my Department's Roads Service is fully committed to improving road safety across the whole of Northern Ireland, through the completion of improvement schemes, where required.

As a result of the problems at this stretch of the A27 Portadown/Newry Road, known as Jackson's Corner, Roads Service is currently carrying out land negotiations, detailed design work and soil investigations for a road improvement scheme at this location.

Subject to the completion of the normal procedures, and acquisition of the necessary lands, Roads Service intends to commence a scheme at Jackson's Corner later this financial year.

Parking Enforcement Officers

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to extend the powers of Parking Enforcement Officers.

(AQO 745/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the powers of Traffic Attendants who are employed by Roads Service's parking enforcement contractor, NSL Services Group, are established in primary legislation, The Traffic Management (NI) Order 2005.

The main power of a Traffic Attendant is to issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) to vehicles which are detected as parked in contravention of decriminalised parking restrictions. In addition, Traffic Attendants also have the power to inspect Blue Badges, in relation to the function of parking enforcement.

At present, there are no plans to extend these powers.

Public Transport: Young People

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of whether budget cuts will affect access to public transport for young people.

(AQO 746/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Public transport funding helps support travel on the bus and rail networks. As key users of public transport, young people are important beneficiaries of the funding.

When formulating budgets and possible budget savings, young peoples' needs for access to public transport were considered along with the needs of the other groups using services.

Rather than budget cuts, baseline revenue funding actually increased between 2010/11 and the current financial year 2011/12 which is also the first year of Budget 2010. This is largely because of additional Public Service Obligation or deficit funding of the NI Railways network. This has been supplemented by £3.1m of additional funding for Concessionary Fares recently announced in October monitoring. You will be aware that Translink fares have not increased since last year and this will clearly benefit regular users of public transport.

The Budget 2010 also included savings delivery plans for public transport. These impact mainly in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Translink's detailed plans for these years have yet to be firmed up and will be adjusted closer to the time. There are clearly challenges to be faced in delivering these savings, particularly for bus services.

Currently children under the age of 16 can avail of half fare on public transport. Translink have identified students as a very important market and user group. In addition to providing services to/from colleges and universities, Translink have delivered a comprehensive programme of promotion and engagement including discounted fares to encourage students to use its bus and rail services.

Public Transport: Students

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development what proposalsTranslink has to encourage students to make greater use of bus and rail travel.

(AQO 747/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has identified students as a very important market and user group. In addition Translink provides focused services to/from colleges and universities such as the Unilink service from Queens University to the Ulster University Jordanstown and Metro 26 to the new Belfast Metropolitan College.

Translink has delivered a comprehensive programme of advertising, promotion, and information distribution. Translink has also had direct engagement through road shows at third level colleges.

Translink offers discounted fares to encourage students to use their bus and rail services.

Students in full-time education can obtain up to 13 months of discounted travel with a Translink Student Discount Card costing £7.00. Reductions are also available on cross border services. Discounts include:

- special student single and return fares on many Ulsterbus routes; as well as a discount of up to a sixth (15%) on standard adult fares of £2.00 or more; and
- a discount of up to a third (33%) on Northern Ireland Railways adult single fares, with Student Day Return Tickets available, costing twice the student single fare.

This year Translink's student campaign ran from early September until the beginning of October, with all the main Fresher events covered. Translink gave trial Student Discount Cards to those who attended these events. Translink also promotes the Student Discount Card by means of outdoor, social media and radio advertising. A number of partner offers are also available to students who obtain the Translink Student Discount Card.

There is also information for students available on the Translink website which has details of the discount card and discounts which are available on Translink services.

Roads: Noise Pollution

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development what methods are currently being used to address the issue of noise pollution from traffic on road networks close to residential areas.

(AQO 748/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that I am due to meet him and residents of Knockeen Road, Ballymena later this month to discuss the issue of noise from the A26 Ballee Road East to M2 Ballymena Bypass Dualling Scheme.

For all new road schemes, a noise assessment is undertaken for all proposals during the scheme appraisal stage. Findings from this assessment work, which will include recommendations for mitigation, will be included in the environmental impact assessment (EIA), which forms part of the Environment Statement.

There are a range of noise mitigation measures that may be considered including route realignment, using natural topography to exploit any natural screening, acoustic barriers or particular road surface materials. Where appropriate, these types of measures may be incorporated into the design of the proposed scheme.

The Noise Insulation Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 provides for the insulation of certain eligible buildings or facades against noise caused, or expected to be caused, by traffic using new roads and certain altered roads. In addition, if the value of a property is depreciated as a result of a road scheme, due to specified physical factors, one of which is noise, the owner may be entitled to compensation under Part II of The Land Acquisition and Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 1973.

My Department has also been working closely with DOE on the Environmental Noise Directive. This Directive aims to avoid, prevent or reduce the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise.

In 2007, my Department produced road traffic noise maps for major roads and all roads in Belfast and subsequently, also prepared a Roads Noise Action Plan. This action plan seeks to manage noise issues and effects from road traffic including noise reduction, if necessary, and the protection of relatively quiet urban areas where they are identified. Consideration of any potential noise mitigation measures will be based on practicality and cost effectiveness, as well as consistency with transport objectives.

Roads: Resurfacing

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development what information sharing takes place between the Department for Regional Development, Northern Ireland Water and Power NI to ensure that road resurfacing works are carried out concurrently.

(AQO 749/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service and the utility companies, including Northern Ireland Water and Power NI, share information on proposed work programmes at Divisional Road Authority and Utility Committee meetings, which take place every six months. Further information sharing takes place when potential resurfacing works and utility company works are entered on the computerised Northern Ireland Street Works Registration and Notification System (NISRANS).

Roads: Economic Development

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department is doing to prioritise improvements to the roads infrastructure to aid economic development.

(AQO 750/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Investment in roads infrastructure is an essential component in creating jobs and future prosperity. In the short term, it provides much needed jobs in the construction sector, and in the longer term, particularly in the case of strategic road improvements, it facilitates the economic growth which is key to our future competitiveness. The prioritisation of funding towards the strategic road network will be a contributing factor towards our economic recovery.

Given that the Irish Government has indicated it is unable to part-fund the A5 and A8 schemes as originally envisaged, there will be a reallocation of funding to my Department. When this is confirmed, I will consider spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the strategic roads programme.

Department for Social Development

Atos Origin: Remuneration

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the levels of remuneration awarded to Atos Origin personnel for carrying out work capability assessments; (ii) the targets set, within the terms of a contract, for Atos Origin personnel to reduce the number of claimants qualifying for Employment and Support Allowance; and (ii) whether Atos Origin receives a bonus for meeting any such targets.

(AQW 4118/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Following a procurement exercise, international healthcare provider, Atos Origin IT Services (Atos Healthcare), was appointed to provide Medical Support Services to the Department for Social Development. The contract was signed on 12 January 2011 and service provision commenced on 20 June 2011.

Atos Healthcare are contracted to provide work capability assessments for Employment and Support Allowance and medical assessments for Disability Living Allowance.

There are no targets within the contractwith Atos Healthcare to reduce the number of claimants qualifying for Employment and Support Allowance. All decisions in respect of entitlement to the Employment Support Allowance are made by Social Security Agency staff based on the available evidence including the outcomes from the Work Capability Assessment and the customer's completed questionnaire.As there are no targets for reducing the number of claimants qualifying for Employment and Support Allowance, there are no related bonuses.

The levels of remuneration within the Medical Support Services Agreement for individual personnelare employment related matters for Atos and their employees; my Department does not have access to this information. I can confirm that the contract with Atos Origin IT Services has been awarded for 7 years with the option to extend for a further 3 years, and the total value of the contract over 7 years is £82m.

North Street flats, Newry

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any plans to build social housing on, or develop, the site of the North Street flats, Newry.

(AQW 4165/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have recently published the Newry City Centre Masterplan. This plan identifies the site of the North Street flats as an ideal location for a mixed use scheme, incorporating residential, commercial and community uses, with car parking to the rear and a new active frontage. Officials from my Regional Development Office will now start to work with the Masterplan Implementation Board to take forward the development of this site.

Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the public benefit dispute element of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

(AQO 751/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In June 2010, Senior Counsel acting for the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland identified a technical difficulty with the "public benefit" test provision of the Charities Act (NI) 2008. In short, this arises out of the inclusion in Section 3 of the 2008 Act of a combination of unrelated provisions on the "public benefit" test from both the Charities Act 2006 (which applies in England and Wales) and the Scottish Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005.

No resolution was reached during the previous mandate and I am now considering afresh the options available to resolve this legal issue. I have received advice from the Attorney General and officials from my Department briefed the Social Development Committee on 20 October. I have also written to the Treasury Minister with responsibility for charity tax matters to establish if changes to the public benefit provisions will have any implications for HM Revenue & Customs. Once a response is received, I will make a decision and bring forward a Charities Amendment Bill to the Executive for consideration.

Voluntary and Community Sector: Concordat with the Northern Ireland Government

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the recently published Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Government.

(AQO 752/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is important that Government and the voluntary and community sector work in partnership to build a better society. Everyone recognises that good working relationships between Government and the Sector are vital to the public interest.

My assessment is that the Concordat creates an important framework between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector which supports opportunities for greater co-operation, increased collaboration, modernisation of service delivery arrangements, a reduction of the administrative burden and the enhancement of skills.

All signatories to the Concordat share the belief that these partnership arrangements will assist citizens and communities to empower themselves, make a significant contribution to democratic governance, bring people and politicians closer together and provide opportunities to influence decision making and resource allocation.

Like all of my Ministerial colleagues who have also signed up to the Concordat, I believe that the Concordat establishes new structures of engagement and can make a worthwhile contribution to a more cohesive society here in Northern Ireland.

Social Housing: Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Ms Lewis asked the Minister for Social Development what percentage of social housing stock is supplied with gas and what proportion within that category are fitted with carbon monoxide detectors.

(AQO 759/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Approximately 36% of Housing Executive dwellings currently have gas heating. The percentage figure within that category fitted with carbon monoxide detectors is not available as the Housing Executive does not provide carbon monoxide detectors with gas heating.

Carbon monoxide can be produced by any fuel burning heating appliance not functioning properly. If an appliance is regularly serviced (that is, annually) by a competent person and is not of unreasonable age or condition it is very unlikely to produce carbon monoxide. The Housing Executive mitigates the risk of carbon monoxide build ups in its dwellings through regular inspection and service regimes, as well as the specifications for new heating installations. For example, most gas boilers are room-sealed drawing combustion air from and discharging flue gases to outside air and therefore cannot, without major physical damage to the appliance, release carbon monoxide into a dwelling.

However, the Housing Executive earlier this year reviewed it policy on the provision of carbon monoxide detectors and as a result carbon monoxide detectors have been installed in almost all their properties that have a solid fuel glass fronted fire, any remaining such properties will have a detector installed during routine servicing. The Housing Executive is also currently installing carbon monoxide detectors in rooms where flues from gas heating appliances are concealed in a void or duct where the flues cannot be inspected.

In relation to Housing Associations, approximately 46% of their properties are supplied with gas, and of these, approximately 49% have carbon monoxide alarms fitted. Whilst most Housing Associations have detectors fitted to a number of properties, 17 Housing Associations have fitted or plan to fit carbon monoxide detectors to all their properties supplied with gas.

Whilst there is currently no statutory requirement to fit carbon monoxide detectors, there are some changes to Part L (Combustion appliances and flue storage systems) ofthe Building Regulations that will come into effect in the first quarter 2012 and will include a new regulation to require the provision of carbon monoxide alarms in dwellings where a combustion appliance is newly installed or replaced.

I will be writing to all Housing Associations and to the Housing Executive to request that they consider the installation of Carbon Monoxide detectors in all homes.

Welfare Reform

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the impact that the welfare reform proposals will have on people in most need.

(AQO 760/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform Bill currently progressing through the House of Lords at Westminster introduces a wide range of changes to our existing Social Security, Benefits' and Welfare system. As the Assembly will be aware we do have devolved responsibility for Social Security matters here in Northern Ireland but we are constrained from delivering our benefits much differently from the rest of the UK both by logistical matters such as IT support systems and most importantly by the principle of parity which dictates that where we do things differently we will bear the financial consequences.

This principle of 'parity' dictates that an individual in Northern Ireland will be subject to the same conditions by way of entitlement, and will receive the same by Social Security benefits as an individual elsewhere in the UK.

My Department has carried out a 'draft' Equality Impact Assessment on the proposals for welfare reform here in Northern Ireland and we are currently consulting on this EQIA – closing date for

comments is 30th November. Following this period of consultation I will consider all the views expressed and bring forward my proposals to this Assembly.

The proposals being advanced at Westminster represent the most radical overhaul of our Welfare system for a number of decades. Whilst the agenda for reform is wide ranging few can argue with the principles behind the need for such reform. The Coalition Government is seeking to simplify our existing benefits' system, incentivise individuals to take up employment, to ensure that work always pays and to ensure the long-term future affordability of our welfare system.

Can I say in closing that as Minister for Social Development I do not welcome proposals that will inevitably impact on household incomes here in Northern Ireland. I recognise of course that reform is necessary but I will be closely examining proposals, in the context of parity. In progressing the reform agenda here in Northern Ireland I will continue to endeavour to ensure that our future welfare system is fit for purpose and that it reflects the values of any modern democracy which seeks to provide the support necessary to protect those most in need.

Social Housing: East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how he intends to increase the availability of social housing in the areas of highest social deprivation in East Londonderry.

(AQO 761/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This year I am making nearly £143m available to support the construction of 1400 new homes right across Northern Ireland. As far as East Londonderry is concerned, there are currently four schemes included in this year's Social Housing Development Programme that could provide 38 units of accommodation. Housing Associations have also expressed an interest in a further 12 sites across the constituency with the potential to deliver 112 new homes. I will ensure these are given full consideration when the Social Housing Development Programme for 2012 – 2015 is submitted for my approval next year.

Alongside the construction of these new homes, I also want to see more empty homes brought back into use. This is another avenue that can help meet housing need and I have already tasked the Housing Executive to bring forward plans to tackle the blight of empty homes.

My officials have raised concerns with me in relation to this year's housing budget and I have now written to the Chairman of the Housing Executive to stress the importance I attach, and the personal commitment I expect from him, to ensure that all monies allocated are fully utilised and deliver both in terms of the Social Housing Development programme and the maintenance programme, as well as the additional funding that was secured to support a dedicated double glazing scheme.

Social Housing: Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development what steps the Housing Executive is taking to reduce waiting lists for social housing in the Carrickfergus area.

(AQO 762/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This year I am making nearly £143m available to support the construction of 1400 new homes right across Northern Ireland. As far as Carrickfergus is concerned, there are currently two schemes included in this year's Social Housing Development Programme that could provide 32 units of accommodation.

However, it is clear that with a need for up to 60 new homes each year, more must be done to identify sites to support new housing in the town and reduce the waiting lists further.

The Social Housing Development Programme for 2012 - 2015 is currently being formulated by the Housing Executive and I have advised them that more must be done to meet housing need in the town. I shall expect to see evidence of this when the draft Programme is submitted to me for approval next year.

Alongside the construction of these new homes, I also want to see more empty homes brought back into use. This is another avenue that can help meet housing need and I have already tasked the Housing Executive to bring forward plans to tackle the blight of empty homes.

My officials have raised concerns with me in relation to this year's housing budget and I have now written to the Chairman of the Housing Executive to stress the importance I attach, and the personal commitment I expect from him, to ensure that all monies allocated are fully utilised and deliver both in terms of the Social Housing Development programme and the maintenance programme, as well as the additional funding that was secured to support a dedicated double glazing scheme.

Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how the differences between the voluntary sector and the community sector are recognised by his Department, through the development of departmental policies and programmes.

(AQO 763/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Northern Ireland benefits greatly from a vibrant and diverse voluntary and community sector. In many respects, voluntary organisations and community groups share similar principles and work towards common goals and the Executive's commitments to joint working with the sector that are enshrined in the Concordat apply equally both.

- By their nature, community groups are associations of people who come together to pursue a common concern or interest, often on a self help basis. Most typically they have as their area of interest a neighbourhood or village; they rely very heavily on volunteer effort and tend to operate from a low or no income base.
- The Department endeavours to tailor its policies, programmes and working practices to meet the needs of this wide spectrum of voluntary and community activity. Financial support is made available to both voluntary organisations and community groups through a number of programme interventions including Neighbourhood Renewal and Areas at Risk both of which recognise the centrality of community groups to neighbourhood regeneration. Officials in the Department provide a range of development support to community organisations and financial assistance is also provided to councils and to a range of infrastructure bodies to ensure that the views of small community organisations are represented in consultation processes. The Department's policy and programme support for volunteering is designed to enhance volunteering opportunities and bring benefit to both voluntary organisations and community groups.

Housing Executive: Vacant Houses

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to refurbish vacant houses within the Housing Executive stock for renting or selling.

(AQO 764/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has planned schemes for major refurbishment of 716 vacant properties. A further 617 vacant Housing Executive properties are available for letting and 828 are pending sale or demolition, as at 19 October 2011.

An empty homes working group has been established and includes representatives from Housing Division, Urban Regeneration, the Housing Executive and Land & Property Services. The previous Housing Executive empty homes strategy action plan attempted to tackle empty homes across Northern Ireland, although the measures included were limited and primarily focused on advice and didn't make use of enforcement provisions at all. The group agreed that a new action plan will contain a fuller range of methods. The aim is to have two pilots established before the end of the year.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Capital Projects

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Social Development whether any Neighbourhood Renewal capital projects have been identified for completion during the current budgetary period.

(AQO 765/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Yes, a number of capital projects have been identified for completion during the current budgetary period, some 36 projects have been awarded contracts to a value of £6.6 million to date.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Members' Pension Funds

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission for its assessment of the article in 'The Detail' on 13 October 2011 concerning Members' pension funds; and whether any action is being taken to address this issue.

(AQW 4238/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Trustees of the Assembly Members Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) appoint an Investment Manager to invest the pension fund in accordance with the Statement of Investment Principles which is available on the Pension Scheme page of the Assembly website at http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/pension/investment_principles.htm.

The Statement of Investment Principles and the appointment of the Investment Manager is a matter for the Pension Trustees. The Commission is informed that the Trustees will review the Statement of Investment Principles at its next meeting due to be held in January 2012.

The Commission is assured that the Trustees have carried out their duties in good faith and in accordance with the law as it relates to pensions, tax and trust matters.

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Revised Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Anaerobic Digestion Plants

In Bound Volume 66, page WA 188, replace the answer to the question (AQW 2284/11-15) asked by Mr Buchanan with:

(AQW 2284/11-15)

Ms O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My reply in September 2011 indicated information available from my Department's records regarding Planning Service Applications for Anaerobic Digestion Plants. However at that time I was unsighted of records held by the Department of the Environment's Planning Service. These records show (i) that the number of occasions in each of the last two years on which DARD has been consulted is as shown in Table 1:

TABLE 1

Year	**Number of occasions**
1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010	4
1 September 2010 to 14 October 2011	67
Total	**71**

(ii) Responses have been completed for 63 of these; (iii) eight responses are in the process of consultation; (iv) the average time taken to respond to the completed requests was approximately 60 working days.

Official Report (Hansard)

Members' Index

MEMBERS' INDEX

Agnew, Mr Steven
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 413
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways, 65–6
Oral Answers
Education
DE Circular 1979/10: 'Greater Involvement of Young People in the Youth Service', 91
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Shale Gas Fracturing, 165
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health and Social Care Services: Commissioning, 210
Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme, 286
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Committee on Climate Change Report, WA340
Hydraulic Fracturing, WA340
Implanted Microchips, WA14
Stray Animals, WA15
Sustainable Livestock Bill, WA7–8
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Hydraulic Fracturing, WA344
Education
Draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy, WA26, WA28
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Combined Heat and Power, WA199
Committee on Climate Change Report, WA378
Energy Bill, WA189
Energy Framework, WA50
Friends of the Earth 'Reckless Gamblers' Report, WA298, WA379
Fuel Poverty Report, WA376
Gas Industry: Growth, WA378
Gas Network, WA198
Government-sponsored Investment Bank, WA51
Green New Deal: Reallocation of Renewable Heat Incentive Funding, WA188
Hydraulic Fracturing, WA200, WA289
Infastrata PLC and eCORP Oil and Gas UK Ltd, WA48
Loans and Finance Provided by Invest NI to Gas and Oil Companies, WA199
Oil and Gas Wealth Fund, WA294
Peak Oil, WA51
Petroleum Licences: Applications, WA288
Production of Energy from Offshore Wind, WA295
Renewable Heat Incentive, WA188, WA198
Rihanna Music Video, WA201
Shale Production, WA200
Smart Meters, WA199
Strategic Energy Framework 2010, WA295
Strategic Energy Framework Implementation Plan, WA287
Utility Regulator's Energy Efficiency Schemes and the Green New Deal, WA189
Waste Water Heat Streams from Factories and Power Plants, WA53
Environment
Article 3 of the Occupiers' Liability (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, WA64
Article 10 of the Recreation and Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, WA63–4
Article 21 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, WA54, WA55, WA56, WA57
Article 27 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, WA57
Article 28 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, WA63
Article 29 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, WA63
Discharge Consents, WA67
Environmental Impact of Hydraulic Fracturing, WA68
Pollution Inspections, WA65
Finance and Personnel
Corporation Tax, WA70
Energy Efficiency and the Low Carbon Homes Schemes, WA305
Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit, WA72
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Autism Strategy, WA213
Bangor Town Centre: Street Parking, WA89
Caring for Patients with Pregnancy Loss, WA419
Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, WA312
Erne Hospital: Old Equipment, WA216
Wage Rate of Staff Required to "Act Up", WA216
Health and Social Care Trust Staff, WA308

Health and Social Care Trusts: Effective Internal Communication, WA217
Marmot Review, WA419
Staffing Arrangements for the South West Acute Hospital, WA308
Justice
EU Directive, WA426
EU Directive 2010/64, WA424
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Capital Investment Projects: Shortfalls, WA339
Junior Ministers, WA130
Ministerial Subcommittee for Children and Young People, WA129
Ten-year Strategy for Children and Young People, WA129, WA130
Regional Development
Park-and-ride Facilities, WA432
Travel Ticket for People with Disabilities, WA115
Social Development
Fuel Poverty, WA120
Strategic Review of Gambling Policy, Practice and Law, WA257

Allister, Mr Jim
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 265–6, 266
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 397, 398
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Environment, 254
Inland Waterways, 65
Language Body, 70
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 49, 49–50, 50
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Salmon Conservation, 348
Employment and Learning
St Mary's University College, Belfast, 36
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Investment Strategy, 30–1
Regional Development
Drinking Water, 283
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 74, 76, 77, 82, 83
Prison Review: Final Report, 312–13, 313, 316
Universities: Students' Community Background, 324, 326, 333–4, 334
Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme,286
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Agricultural Wages Board, WA271
Appointment of Special Advisers, WA16
Area VII under the Western Waters, WA13
Belfast Telegraph Advertisement, WA133
European Union Subsidy Payments, WA271, WA272
Mourne Herring Fishery, WA12
Quota, WA11
Stocks, WA12
Press Advertising, WA133
Scallops, WA13
Assembly Commission
MLA Salaries, WA121
Pension Contributions for Members, WA121
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Appointment of Special Advisers, WA20, WA163
Odyssey Trust Company Limited, WA23, WA345
Directors and Staff, WA275
Report, WA352
Sports: Funding, WA22
Ulster-Scots Agency: Board, WA20
Education
Appointment of Special Advisers, WA34
Special Advisers, WA23
Viability Audit, WA27
Employment and Learning
Appointment of Special Advisers, WA176
Campus Sporting Clubs, WA44
Recruitment of Students from a Protestant Working Class Background, WA182
University Enrolments, WA182
University of Ulster, WA41
Staff, WA43
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Gas Passing Through the Transmission Pipelines, WA291
Independent Retail Sector, WA284
Indigenous Businesses, WA284
Invest NI: Jobs, WA286
Postalised Gas Transmission Tariffs, WA296, WA297
Properties Suitable for Foreign Investment, WA195
Single Electricity Market, WA290
Environment
Rowan Tree Centre, Pomeroy: Units, WA66
Finance and Personnel
Air Passenger Duty, WA71

Criminal Injury Compensation, WA205
Unfunded Pressures Flowing from Inflation, WA207
Vacant Domestic Properties, WA70
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Appeal No: EA/2010/0155, WA209
Inflammatory Bowel Disease, WA223
Invest to Save Scheme, WA222
Justice
Oval Football Ground: Firework Attack, WA426
Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme, WA98
Police Ombudsman, WA316
Prison Review Team, WA313
Annex 1 of the Final Report, WA100
R v Haddock & Others, WA423
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Executive Office in Brussels, WA1
Historical Institutional Abuse: Inquiry, WA269
Special Advisers, WA126–7
Strategic Investment Board, WA340
Members, WA2
Regional Development
A5 Project, WA324
Appointment of Special Advisers: Review, WA244
Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Line, WA105
Translink Staff, WA329

Anderson, Ms Martina
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 266–8

Anderson, Mr Sydney
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 10
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
GAA: Tyrone Centre of Excellence, 350
Employment and Learning
St Mary's University College, Belfast, 35
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health and Social Care Services: Review, 207
Justice
Resettlement of Offenders, 215
Private Members' Business
Pat Finucane Case, 171, 172, 173
Prison Review: Final Report, 309–10
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Arm's-Length Bodies, WA11
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arm's-Length Bodies, WA18
Fish Poaching in Inland Waterways, WA20
Líofa 2015, WA148
Education
St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge, WA367
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Advice4DebtNI, WA301
Arm's-length Bodies: Value for Money Audits, WA189
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Funding for Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy, WA219
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Arm's-length Bodies: Value for Money Audits, WA339
Regional Development
Arm's-Length Bodies, WA111

Attwood, Mr Alex
Executive Committee Business
Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, 11–12, 14
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council:
Environment, 248–9, 250, 250–1, 251–2, 252, 253, 254
Road Safety, 132, 132–3, 133, 134, 134–5, 135, 136
Oral Answers
Environment
National Park, 155, 155-6, 156
Planning Applications, 158, 159
Septic Tanks, 156, 156–7, 157, 159, 159-60, 160
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 58, 58–60, 60
Planning Enforcement, 220-1, 221-2, 222-3
Written Answers
Environment
Article 3 of the Occupiers' Liability (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, WA64–5
Article 10 of the Recreation and Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, WA64
Article 21 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, WA54–5, WA55–6, WA56, WA57
Article 27 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, WA57–9
Article 28 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, WA63
Article 29 of the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, WA63

Beaches, WA302
Better Regulation, WA303
Blue Flag Status of Beaches, WA202–3
Capital Resources, WA60
Discharge Consents, WA67–8
Driver and Vehicle Agency Testing Centres, WA394–5
Election Posters, WA65, WA67
Endangered Wildlife Species, WA381
Enforcement Notices Illegal Developments: North Down, WA203
Environmental Damage Caused by Fuel Laundering, WA203
Environmental Impact of Hydraulic Fracturing, WA69
EU Directive 2009/113/EC, WA384, WA384–5
EU Water Framework Directive, WA304
Fly-posting, WA393–4
Herds of Wild Deer, WA381–2
Illegally Dumped Waste, WA383
Litter, WA304
Local Councils, WA386-7
Number of, WA60
Staff, WA387–90
Local Government
Members of the Legislative Assembly, WA303
Review of Public Administration, WA305
Motor Tax: Revenue Generated, WA381
Northern Ireland Environment Agency, WA393
Farm Inspections, WA304
Planning: Wind Farms, WA305
Pollution Inspections, WA65–6
Planning Applications, WA391–2
Planning Service, WA382
Proposed Capital Spend Projects, WA61–3
Resource Grants, WA60–1
Rivers: Pollution, WA301
Road Safety Grants, WA66
Rowan Tree Centre, Pomeroy: Units, WA66
Scrap Metal Dealers, WA383
Seal Population, WA67
Single Use Carrier Bags, WA68, WA302–3
Single Wind Turbines and Wind Farms: Applications, WA65
Surplus Land in North Down Owned by the Department, WA202
Taxi Enforcement, WA385–6
Taxi Ranks, WA386
Theft of Metals from Buildings, WA383
Tourism: Built Heritage, WA301–2
Townland Addresses, WA67
Victims of Domestic Violence within his Department, WA204
Waste Management Schemes, WA392
Written Ministerial Statements
Environment
Extreme Rainfall: Help for Householders, WMS1–2

Beggs, Mr Roy
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 409
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council:
Road Safety, 135–6
Roads and Transport, 130
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 49
Oral Answers
Finance and Personnel
EU Structural Funds: East Antrim, 95
Regional Development
Flood Prevention, 280
Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme, 285
Written Answers
Assembly Commission
Childcare Voucher Scheme, WA267
Finance and Personnel
Chairperson or Chief Executive: Arm's-length Bodies, WA69
Invoices for Construction Work, WA69
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Regional Development
Daily Traffic Levels, WA112
Social Development
Cairngorm Drive and Shanlea Drive, Larne: Flats, WA261
Demolishing Unwanted Flats and Houses, WA261

Beggs, Mr Roy (as Deputy Speaker)
Adjournment
Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh, 240
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123, 126, 128
Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site, 370, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 379
Committee Business
Committee Membership, 15
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe: Assembly Nominee, 15
Oral Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 160

Invest NI: Performance, 166
Tourism: Ulster Scots, 162
Unemployment, 161
Environment, 155
National Park, 156
Planning Applications, 158, 159
Septic Tanks, 157
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 175
Community Pharmacies, 102, 107, 109, 111, 112, 118
Education and Skills Authority, 228, 229, 230, 231, 234
Forensic Science Services, 16, 19, 20, 23, 27, 28
Maze Prison Site, 102
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 367, 368, 369
Pat Finucane Case, 153, 154, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175
Prison Review: Final Report, 301, 304, 306, 307, 308, 309, 312, 317, 318, 320
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 290, 291, 293, 296

Bell, Mr Jonathan
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Child Poverty, 277, 278
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, 275–6, 276, 276–7, 277

Boylan, Mr Cathal
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Environment, 250
Road Safety, 133
Private Members' Business
Planning Enforcement, 199, 199–200

Boyle, Ms Michaela
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 195–6
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 144
Oral Answers
Employment and Learning
Labour Relations Agency: Temporary Workers, 39
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust, 209
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 116–18, 118
Education and Skills Authority, 232
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 290–1, 291
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
North West Regional College: Strabane Campus, WA46
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Industry: Automatic Assisted Area Status, WA299

Bradley, Mr Dominic
Adjournment
Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh, 242-3
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Inland Waterways, 65
Language Body, 68
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 45
Oral Answers
Employment and Learning
Essential Skills for Living, 39
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Tourism: Ulster Scots, 162
Environment
Planning Applications, 159
Finance and Personnel
Rates: Business Premises, 94
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Dementia Strategy, 210
Justice
Alcohol: Minimum Pricing, 214
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Investment Strategy, 31
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 111
Education and Skills Authority, 234, 237, 238
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
2012 Olympics Games, WA347
Centenary of the Birth of Myles na gCopaleen, WA157
Indigenous Languages Strategy, WA348
Irish-language Organisations, WA348
Lottery Funding to the 2012 Olympics, WA277
Education
Teachers on Medical Suspension, WA363
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
October Monitoring Round: Funding Allocation, WA220
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Asset Management Unit, WA339
Childcare Fund, WA270
Social Investment Fund, WA270

Bradley, Ms Paula
Adjournment
Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site, 374, 374–5
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 195
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 143
North/South Ministerial Council: Environment, 252
Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health and Social Care Services: Commissioning, 210
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 56
Community Pharmacies, 109
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 294–5
Written Answers
Education
Belfast Education and Library Board: Educational Psychology Service, WA38
Employment and Learning
Steps to Work: North Belfast, WA45
Environment
Litter, WA304
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Social Investment Fund, WA3

Brady, Mr Mickey
Adjournment
Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh, 244
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 194–5, 195
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 142–3
Oral Answers
Education
Home-to-school Transport, 89
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health and Social Care Services: Review, 207–8
Justice
Alcohol: Minimum Pricing, 214
Social Development
Welfare Reform, 345
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 110–11
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 292–3, 293
Written Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry: Accident and Emergency Unit, WA79
Royal College of Physicians' National Sentinel Stroke Audit 2010: Public Report, WA417
Stroke Units, WA417
Social Development
North Street flats, Newry, WA437

Buchanan, Mr Thomas
Assembly Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 262, 262–3, 263
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 410
Private Members' Business
Universities: Students' Community Background, 329-30
Revised Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Anaerobic Digestion Plants, RWA 1
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Beragh, County Tyrone: Flooding, WA341, WA342, WA343
Flooding Review, WA343
Justice
Security: Dissident Republicans, WA318
Social Development
Housing Executive: Vacant Houses, WA440

Byrne, Mr Joe
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Environment, 253–4
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 47
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
GAA: Tyrone Centre of Excellence, 350
Employment and Learning
Northern Regional College: Magherafelt Campus, 40
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Unemployment, 161
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Hospital Appointments, 212
Social Development
Boiler Replacement Scheme, 347
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 180–1
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 359–60
Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme, 285

Written Answers
Education
Rural Schools, WA37

Campbell, Mr Gregory
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 8
Oral Answers
Education
Home-to-school Transport, 88
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Unemployment, 160–1
Finance and Personnel
Rates: Empty Properties, 96
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Hospital Appointments, 212
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ilex Regeneration Plan, 278
Private Members' Business
Pat Finucane Case, 168–9, 169, 171, 173
Universities: Students' Community Background, 323–4, 324, 326, 328, 331, 336
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Assistance for People Living and Working in Rural Areas, WA6
Energy Prices, WA132
Financial Facilities to Assist Farmers, WA132
Forestry Grant Scheme: East Londonderry, WA145
Renewable Energy Projects: Assistance, WA8
Assembly Commission
Assembly Members' Pension Fund, WA123
Pension Arrangements for MLAs and Ministers, WA121
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Association Football, WA17
Cultural Tourism, WA16
Education
Education Maintenance Allowance, WA279
Private Sector Bus Companies, WA24
Employment and Learning
Education Maintenance Allowance, WA184
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Causeway Coast: Quality Hotels, WA53
Environment
Driver and Vehicle Agency Testing Centres, WA394
Election Posters, WA65, WA67
Northern Ireland Environment Agency, WA392
Single Use Carrier Bags, WA68
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
10-day Target for Payment of Invoices, WA212
Hospitals: Accident and Emergency Departments, WA311
Justice
Courts Estate: Working of, WA228
Death of Kevin McDaid: Trial, WA95
District Policing Partnerships, WA225
Magilligan: New Prison, WA224
Northern Ireland Prison Service: Review, WA224
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Arm's-length Bodies, WA131
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme, WA102
Airport Passenger Numbers, WA103
Ballyquin Road to the Greystone Roundabout in Limavady: 30 mph Section, WA327
Blue Badges, WA242
Londonderry to Coleraine Railway Line, WA104
Salt or Grit in Storage, WA324
Social Development
Fuel Poverty, WA257
Housing Stress, WA116
Oil Stamp Saving Schemes, WA261
Social Housing: East Londonderry, WA439
Urban Development Grant Scheme, WA264

Clarke, Mr Trevor
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU financial Corrections, 261, 262
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Environment, 253
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 78
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
United States of America: Links with, WA3

Clarke, Mr Willie
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU financial Corrections, 264, 265
Oral Answers
Environment
Planning Applications, 159
Regional Development
Footpaths: Backaderry Road, Leitrim, County Down, 280
Private Members' Business
Planning Enforcement, 204, 204–5, 205
Written Answers
Finance and Personnel
Banks: Dormant Accounts, WA75

Cochrane, Mrs Judith
Adjournment
Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site, 376
Ministerial Statements
Public expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 49
Written Answers
Education
Computer Science, WA25
Employment and Learning
DEL: Community Divisions, WA45

Copeland, Mr Michael
Adjournment
Girdwood Barracks Site, 375, 375–6, 376
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 397
Oral Answers
Employment and Learning
Labour Relations Agency: Temporary Workers, 40
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, 275
Regional Development
Drinking Water, 282
Social Development
Alcohol Pricing, 347
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 100, 100–1
Written Answers
Environment
EU Water Framework Directive, WA304
Finance and Personnel
Belfast Harbour Commissioners: Funds Held by, WA208
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Kinship Care
Arrangements, WA420
Children in, WA420
Foster Assessments, WA420
Social Development
Housing Associations: Pursuit of Funds, WA265
Temperature Variances, WA334
Voluntary and Community Sector, WA440

Craig, Mr Jonathan
Adjournment
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 118–20
Private Members' Business
Forensic Science Services, 16–17, 21–2
Written Answers
Environment
Motor Tax: Revenue Generated, WA381
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Huntingdon's Disease, WA81
Justice
RUC Museum, WA319
Regional Development
Illegally Selling Cars on a Public Footpath or Road, WA109
Roads: Economic Development, WA436
Translink: New Rolling Stock, WA109

Cree, Mr Leslie
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 407
Ministerial Statements
Public expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 48
Oral Answers
Education
Home-to-school Transport, 88
Finance and Personnel
EU Financial Transaction Tax, 97
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust, 209
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA15
Assembly Commission
Translation of Ulster Scots, WA335
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA21
Education
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA29
Employment and Learning
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA40
Environment
Local Government: Members of the Legislative Assembly, WA303
Finance and Personnel
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA74
Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA207
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Cost of Answering an Assembly Question, WA212
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA130

Regional Development
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA114
Social Development
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA119

Dallat, Mr John
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 146
North/South Ministerial Council
Language Body, 70
Road Safety, 133–4
Oral Answers
Employment and Learning
Labour Relations Agency: Temporary Workers, 39
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI: East Londonderry, 163
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, 275, 276
Regional Development
Drinking Water, 283
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 112–13
Planning Enforcement, 201–2
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Forests, WA5
Timber Sales, WA4
Travel Costs, WA145
Assembly Commission
Press Officers and Public Relation Officers, WA267
Staff, WA335
Translation of Ulster Scots, WA335
Travel Costs, WA122
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Travel Costs, WA157
Education
Teachers: Suspensions, WA366
Travel Costs, WA165
Employment and Learning
Travel Costs, WA282
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Ballykelly: Former Army Barracks, WA377
Travel Costs, WA197
Finance and Personnel
Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit, WA74
Travel Costs, WA206
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Clinical Negligence: Claims, WA414
Travel Costs, WA218
Justice
Travel Costs, WA229
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ballykelly: Former Army Barracks Site, WA3, WA125
Regional Development
Airport Shuttle Buses, WA244
DRD Property Clean-up, WA113
Salt or Grit Boxes, WA114
Travel Costs, WA323
Social Development
Travel Costs, WA330

Dallat, Mr John (as Deputy Speaker)
Assembly Business
Public Petition: Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn, 247, 248
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 255, 257, 258, 259, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Environment, 248
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 49, 50
Oral Answers
Education, 87
DE Capital Projects: South Antrim, 87
Ethnic Minorities: Barriers to Education, 89
Redburn Primary School, Holywood, 92
Schools: Area Planning, 93
Finance and Personnel, 93
EU Financial Transaction Tax, 97, 98
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 50, 55, 56
Dementia Services, 193, 195
Maze Prison Site, 99, 101
Petition of Concern: Pat Finucane Case, 189
Prison Review: Final Report, 312, 313, 317, 318, 320

Dickson, Mr Stewart
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Road Safety, 134
Roads and Transport, 130–1
Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DHSSPS: Budget 2011-12, 213
Justice
Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme, 214–15

Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 238, 239
Mobile phones: Roaming Charges, 360–1, 363
Prison Review: Final Report, 307
Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme, 285
Written Answers
Regional Development
Audio-visual Information Systems to Buses, WA107
Footpaths, WA107
Larne Railway, WA329
Public Transport, WA108

Dobson, Mrs Jo-Anne
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU financial Corrections, 258–9
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 10
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 47
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Salmon Conservation, 348
Education
Redburn Primary School, Holywood, 92
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Common Agricultural Policy, 32
Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 233, 234
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Flooding: Compensation to Farmers, WA143
Rural Support Networks, WA143
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Gilford Library, WA157
Education
Entitlement Framework, WA363
Transporting Pupils Between Schools: Cost, WA363
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Electricity Rebate, WA193
Regional Development
Castlewellan Road in Banbridge, WA328
Millennium Way in Lurgan, WA329
Traffic-calming Measures at the Blackskull Junction, WA430

Doherty, Mr Pat
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
GAA: Tyrone Centre of Excellence, 350
Regional Development
Flood Prevention, 280
Social Development
Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme, 284
Written Answers
Environment
Beaches, WA302

Douglas, Mr Sammy
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 396
Private Members' Business
Universities: Students' Community Background, 332–3

Dunne, Mr Gordon
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 194
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 144
Oral Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Shale Gas Fracturing, 165
Finance and Personnel
Taxation: Retailers, 98
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Dementia Strategy, 211
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 104–5
Mobile phones: Roaming Charges, 367, 367–8, 368
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 291–2
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, WA352
Employment and Learning
ApprenticeshipsNI, WA45
Environment
Fly-posting, WA393

Durkan, Mr Mark
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 410
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 193
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 142
Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health and Social Care Services: Review, 208

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ilex Regeneration Plan, 278
Social Development
Welfare Reform, 346
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 105–6, 114
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 288
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
Workforce Development Forums, WA45
Finance and Personnel
Rates, WA208
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Business Services Organisation, WA310
Community Pharmacies, WA94
Meals on Wheels Service, WA90
Physiotherapy: Waiting Times, WA89
The Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations Northern Ireland 2011, WA223
Regional Development
Bus Service for Students from Queen's University to Derry, WA246
Public Transport: Students, WA434
Social Development
Boiler Replacement Scheme, WA260
Patients Diagnosed with Cancer, WA259

Easton, Mr Alex
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 146
Oral Answers
Education
Redburn Primary School, Holywood, 91
Fuel Poverty, 343
Private Members' Business
Planning Enforcement, 223, 224
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Ards Peninsula Area: Farms, WA273
Equality Impact Assessments, WA11
European Grants, WA146
Milk Production, WA146
Tree Diseases, WA274
Waterways Running through Crawfordsburn Village, WA10
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Equality Impact Assessments, WA18
Tourism Potential of Canals, WA352
Education
Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College: Land, WA366
Bangor Grammar School, WA27
Sport Pitches, WA28
Central Primary School, Bangor, WA361
Primary Schools: Cost of Repairs, WA279
Employment and Learning
Apprenticeship Places, WA181
External Teaching Bodies, WA368
Job Centres, WA283
Queen's University and Stranmillis University College: Merger, WA46
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Electricity Grid, WA294
Wind Power, WA201
Environment
Blue Flag Status of Beaches, WA202
Capital Resources, WA60
Endangered Wildlife Species, WA381
Herds of Wild Deer, WA381
Seal Population, WA67
Surplus Land in North Down Owned by the Department, WA202
Finance and Personnel
Divorces, WA207
Rates, WA206
Justice
Current Court Numbers, WA227
Legal Aid, WA227
Speeding Offences, WA100
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Regional Development
Bus Routes in North Down: Reduction in Services, WA244
Cotton Area, North Down: Proposed Road Safety Measures, WA109
Down Community Transport, WA104
Dropped Kerb Schemes, WA102
Footpaths in the Ashfield Area of Donaghadee, WA107
NI Water, WA105
Road Markings in the North Down Area, WA107
Salt and Grit Resources, WA242
Secondments, WA326
Sewerage Infrastructure Problems in the Millisle Area, WA106
Spencer Street Area of Holywood: Weed Problems, WA106
Translink:
Budget Plans, WA104
Co-ordinated Timetables, WA243
Social Development
Ards Peninsula: Areas at Risk, WA334

Bloomfield Estate, Bangor: Pensioners' Bungalows, WA266
Co-ownership Housing Applications, WA246
Community Groups: Funding, WA119
Department's Budget, WA331
Disability Living Allowance, WA263
Housing Associations: Funding, WA117
Housing Benefit Fraud, WA264
Housing Executive Staff, WA117
Loughview Estate, Holywood, WA117
Mortgage Relief Scheme, WA119
Newbuild and Maintenance Projects, WA332
Small Pockets of Deprivation, WA264
Vacant Houses, WA116

Eastwood, Mr Colum
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 393
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 9
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Funding, 352
Employment and Learning
DEL: Shared Future, 37
Justice
Office of the Police Ombudsman: Criminal Justice Inspection Report, 218
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Commissioner for Children and Young People, 33
Social Development
Alcohol Pricing, 346
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 72–3
Pat Finucane Case, 174–5
Prison Review: Final Report, 316–17, 317
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Ilex Regeneration Programme, WA342
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Ilex Regeneration Programme, WA350
Sport Matters Capital and Equipment Awards Programme, WA353
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Foreign Direct Investment Generated by Invest NI, WA186
Foyle: Jobs Promoted, WA198
Go for It Programme, WA376
Invest NI: Offices, WA51
Justice
Ilex Regeneration Programme, WA425
Social Development
Boiler Replacement Scheme, WA334
Boiler Scrappage Scheme, WA246
Double Glazing Scheme, WA335

Elliott, Mr Tom
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 387–8
Oral Answers
Education
Schools: Area Planning, 92, 93
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Budget: October Monitoring Round, 274
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 71–2, 72, 75, 77
Mobile phones: Roaming Charges, 364
Written Answers
Education
Transfer 2011 Application Forms, WA362
Finance and Personnel
Banks: Lending, WA75

Farry, Dr Stephen
Oral Answers
Employment and Learning
DEL: Shared Future, 37, 38
Essential Skills for Living, 38, 38–9, 39
Labour Relations Agency: Temporary Workers, 39, 39–40, 40
Northern Regional College: Magherafelt Campus, 40, 40–1
Schools: Ballymoney Learning Community, 36, 36–7
St Mary's University College, Belfast, 35, 36
Private Members' Business
Universities: Students' Community Background, 335–6, 336–8
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
Adult Apprenticeship Funding, WA41
Appointment of Special Advisers, WA176
Apprenticeship Places, WA181
ApprenticeshipsNI, WA45–6
Campus Sporting Clubs, WA44
Capital Spend Projects for Higher and Further Education, WA183–4
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA41
DEL
Community Divisions, WA45

Equality Training, WA46
Department Spend, WA40
Education Maintenance Allowance, WA184
English for Speakers of Other Languages, WA42–3
European Social Fund, WA185, WA186
External Teaching Bodies, WA368
Integrating Colleges, WA40
Job Centres, WA283
Lifelong Learning: Young People with Severe Learning Disabilities, WA184–5
Modern Languages, WA176–80
Courses, WA181
Qualifications, WA180
Moving Up Programme, WA184
North West Regional College: Strabane Campus, WA46–7
October Monitoring Round, WA39–40, WA40
Queen's University and Stranmillis University College: Merger, WA46
Shuttle Bus Service Between Belfast and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, WA39
Recruitment of Students from a Protestant Working Class Background, WA183
Second Languages, WA175–6
St Mary's University College, Belfast, WA171, WA174–5
Applications, WA183
Board of Governors, WA182, WA368
St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast, WA38–9
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA171–4
Step Ahead Programme, WA282–3
Applications, WA368–9
Steps to Work: North Belfast, WA45
Student Places: Increase in 2012-13, WA182
Transport Difficulties Faced by Students in Bad Weather, WA176
Travel Costs, WA282
Universities: Research Funding, WA44–5
University Enrolments, WA182
University of Ulster, WA41–2
Staff, WA43–4
US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership, WA282
Workforce Development Forums, WA45
Young People's Learning Agency, WA44

Flanagan, Mr Phil
Ministerial Statements
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 48
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Community Arts: County Fermanagh, 351
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Hospital Appointments, 211
Regional Development
Altnagelvin Hospital: Transport from Fermanagh, 278–9, 279
Social Development
Alcohol Pricing, 346
Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 228–9, 229
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 354–6, 363, 364, 366, 367
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Flooding that Damaged Premises in Tempo, WA274
Culture, Arts and Leisure
All-Ireland Soccer Team, WA354
Libraries: Wireless Internet Service, WA276
Mobile Libraries, WA344
Mobile Library Service, WA276
Education
Area Learning Community Programme Participation, WA169
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Broadband UK, WA377
Fund, WA378
Connecting Europe Facility: Energy and Broadband, WA200
Fracking, WA54
Invest NI, WA295
Unspent Funding, WA52
Investment and Jobs Created in Each Council Area, WA369
Job Creation Targets in each Council Area, WA374
McIldoon Report on Energy Prices, WA49
Mobile Phone Coverage and Broadband Provision, WA379
Purchases from Suppliers, WA295
Quinn Group, WA290
Quinn Insurance in Enniskillen, WA288
Relocation of Departmental Subsets, WA296
Unemployment Rates: Projections, WA378
Environment
Townland Addresses, WA67
Finance and Personnel
Civil and Public Servant Salaries, WA204
County Fermanagh: Public Sector Jobs, WA73, WA74
Public Sector Employees, WA206

Townland Addresses, WA306
Justice
Prostitution in Fermanagh, WA422
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Social Investment Fund, WA131
Regional Development
A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass, WA323
A4/N16: Upgrade, WA328
Belfast and Sligo: Road Links, WA328
Burning of Effigies in Roads Service Owned Car Parks, WA245
Cherrymount Link Road in Enniskillen, WA322
Dannys Mill Road Area of Enniskillen: Raw Sewage, WA321
Enniskillen Courthouse: Parking, WA322
Connecting Europe Facility, WA320, WA321
Quay Lane Car Park, Enniskillen, WA103
Social Development
Enniskillen and Newry: Cross-border Trade, WA331

Ford, Mr David
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 1–5, 5–6, 6, 6–7, 7, 8, 8–9, 9, 9–10, 10, 10–11
Oral Answers
Justice
Alcohol: Minimum Pricing, 213, 213–14, 214
Antisocial Behaviour, 218, 219
Office of the Police Ombudsman: Criminal Justice Inspection Report, 216, 217
Office of the Police Ombudsman, 219, 219–20
Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme, 214, 215
Policing Board: Staffing, 217, 218
Resettlement of Offenders, 215, 215–16
Private Members' Business
Forensic Science Services, 23-6
Pat Finucane Case, 153–4, 154
Prison Review: Final Report, 313–16, 317–18, 318
Written Answers
Justice
Absolute Discharge, WA427–8
Access to Justice Review, WA313
Access to Justice Review Report, WA229
Access to Justice Review Team, WA228-9
Bench Warrants, WA94–6, WA424–5
Children Who Commit a Criminal Offence, WA313
Colin Duffy, WA424
Complaints Against a Parole Commissioner, WA98
Conditional Discharge, WA99–100, WA421
Convictions for Corporate Manslaughter, WA95
Cost of Keeping an Inmate in Prison, WA227
Courts Estate: Working of, WA228
Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, WA224
Current Court Numbers, WA227–8
Custodial Sentences, WA98
Death of Kevin McDaid: Trial, WA95
Delivery of Non-molestation Orders, WA231
Department Spend, WA100
Desertcreat Training College: Tender Specification, WA96
Disruptive Behaviour During Court Sittings, WA225
District Policing Partnerships, WA226
Domestic Violence Offences: Increased Sentences, WA231
Elderly People: Crimes Against, WA427
EU Directive, WA426
EU Directive 2010/64, WA424
European Arrest Warrants, WA230
Gerry McGeough, WA97
Glorification of Terrorism, WA315
Human Trafficking Legislation, WA426
Ilex Regeneration Programme, WA425
Judicial System: Balance of Human Rights, WA230–1
Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, WA225, WA315–16
Legal Aid, WA227, WA317
Cost, WA422–3
System, WA314, WA314–15
Level of Force that a Householder can use against an Intruder, WA95, WA423
Maghaberry Prison: Disturbance at Roe House, WA96, WA97, WA99
Magilligan: New Prison, WA224
Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum, WA230
Northern Ireland Prison Service: Review, WA224
October Monitoring Round, WA97, WA98
Oval Football Ground: Firework Attack, WA426
Parole Commissioners, WA319
Parole Process, WA98–9
Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme, WA98
Police Ombudsman, WA316
Prison Officers: Sick Leave, WA224
Prison Population, WA423
Prison Review Team, WA313
Annex 1 of the Final Report, WA100–02
Prison Service, WA428

Prisoners, WA316
Annual Cost, WA318
On Remand, WA315
Prostitution in Fermanagh, WA422
R v Haddock & Others, WA423
Released Prisoners, WA96
Robert Black, WA317
RUC Museum, WA319
Secrecy in Civil Courts, WA226–7
Secretary of State for Justice: Proposals, WA316–17
Security
Community Buildings, WA319
Dissident Republicans, WA318
Sentence Tariffs: Changes at Westminster, WA425–6
Sentencing: Previous Convictions, WA226
Separated Prisoners, WA96, WA313
Separated Republican Prisoners, WA99, WA226, WA317
Separated Republican Prisoners' Protest, WA228, WA229, WA230
Sex Offender Notification and Violent Offender Orders, WA318
Small Claims Court, WA427
Speeding Offences, WA100
Travel Costs, WA229
Uninsured Drivers, WA318
Visiting Privileges: Members of the Oireachtas, WA228

Foster, Mrs Arlene
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statement: Economic Strategy, 398–403, 404, 404–5, 405, 406, 406–7, 407, 408, 408–9, 409, 410, 410–11, 411, 412, 412–13, 413
Oral Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI
East Londonderry, 163, 163–4, 164
Performance, 165, 165–6
Shale Gas Fracturing, 164, 164–5, 165
Tourism: Ulster Scots, 161, 162, 162–3
Unemployment, 160, 161
Private Members' Business
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 364–6, 366, 366–7
Written Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Advice4DebtNI, WA301
Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report, WA287, WA288, WA299, WA380
Arm's-length Bodies: Value for Money Audits, WA189
Ballykelly: Former Army Barracks, WA377
Belfast City Council Area: Spend, WA190
Biomass District Heating System in Camphill Community, WA196
Broadband
Annahilt, Co. Down, WA186
South Antrim, WA300
Broadband UK, WA377
Fund, WA378
Business Loans, WA301
Causeway Coast: Quality Hotels, WA53–5
Combined Heat and Power, WA199
Committee on Climate Change Report, WA378
Connecting Europe Facility: Energy and Broadband, WA200
Corporate Bonds, WA48
Cost of Equality Schemes, WA197
Current Businesses, WA190
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: Contact, WA193
Directive 200/35/EC, WA49
Directive 2011/7/EU, WA194
Economy: Cross-border Transport, WA299
Electricity Grid, WA294
Electricity Rebate, WA193
Energy Bill, WA189
Energy Framework, WA50
Energy Regulator, WA380
Feed-in Tariff Scheme for Renewable Energy, WA198
Foreign Direct Investment, WA194, WA195
Generated by Invest NI, WA186–7
Foyle: Jobs Promoted, WA198
Fracking, WA54, WA298
Friends of the Earth 'Reckless Gamblers' Report, WA298, WA379
Fuel Poverty Report, WA376
Gaelic Athletic Association, WA375
Gaelic Games Events
Promotion, WA197
Tourist Potential, WA197
Gas Industry: Growth, WA378
Gas Network, WA198
Gas Passing Through the Transmission Pipelines, WA291
Gas Reservoirs in Shale Deposits off Blackpool, WA298
Go for It Programme, WA377
Government Sponsored Investment Bank, WA51
Grants, WA191, WA191–2

Green New Deal: Reallocation of Renewable Heat Incentive Funding, WA188
Home Heating Oil Prices, WA288
Homecoming Year for Northern Ireland, WA286–7
Hydraulic Fracturing, WA201, WA289
Independent Retail Sector, WA284–5
Indigenous Businesses, WA284
Industry: Automatic Assisted Area Status, WA300
Infastrata PLC and eCORP Oil and Gas UK Ltd, WA48
InterTradeIreland, WA289, WA289–90
Acumen Programme, WA293
All-island Innovation Programme, WA294
Elevate Programme, WA292
Fusion Programme, WA292–3
Go-2-Tender Programme, WA289
Innova Programme, WA294
Programmes, WA288
Invest NI, WA50, WA295
Funding for Non-indigenous Businesses, WA192–3
Jobs, WA286
Offices, WA51–2
Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, WA299
Unspent Funding, WA47, WA48, WA52–3
Investment and Jobs Created in Each Council Area, WA369–73
Job Creation Targets in each Council Area, WA374
Jobs Fund, WA300
Licences for Gas Exploration, WA374
Loans and Finance Provided by Invest NI to Gas and Oil Companies, WA199
Local Anniversaries, WA290
Loyal Order Events: Promotion, WA197
McIldoon Report on Energy Prices, WA49
Mobile Phone Coverage and Broadband Provision, WA379
MTV European Music Awards Aftershow Events, WA292
NI Screen, WA49
Productions, WA283
O2 Mobile Phone Coverage in Cloughmills, WA380
October Monitoring Round: Easements, WA190
Oil and Gas Wealth Fund, WA294
Quinn Group, WA290
Quinn Insurance in Enniskillen, WA288
Peak Oil, WA51
Petroleum Licences: Applications, WA288
Planning Application T/2010/0238, WA200, WA201, WA202
Postalised Gas Transmission Tariffs, WA296, WA297, WA298
Production of Energy from Offshore Wind, WA295
Properties Suitable for Foreign Investment, WA196
Purchases from Suppliers, WA296
Relocation of Departmental Subsets, WA296
Renewable Heat Incentive, WA188, WA189, WA198–9
Rihanna Music Video, WA201
Shale Production, WA200
Single Electricity Market, WA290–1
Smart Grid Technology, WA292
Smart Meters, WA199
Storing Natural Gas in the Salt Caverns Under Larne Lough, WA374
Strategic Energy Framework, WA300
Implementation Plan, WA287
Strategic Energy Framework 2010, WA295
The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming, WA287
Tourist Board, WA376
Masterclass on Sponsorship, WA374–5, WA375
Travel Costs, WA197
Unemployment Rates: Projections, WA378
Utility Regulator's Energy Efficiency Schemes and the Green New Deal, WA189
Warm Homes Discount Scheme, WA194
Waste Water Heat Streams from Factories and Power Plants, WA53
Wind Power, WA201
Wind Turbines, WA299

Frew, Mr Paul
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 255-7, 257
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 408
Ministerial Statements
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 48
Oral Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Common Agricultural Policy, 31, 32
Private Members' Business
Aggregates Levy, 175–7
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Alien Muntjac Deer, Chinese Water Deer and

Roe Deer, WA7
Carcasses of Deer Culled by the Forest Service, WA10
Deer Management Partnership, WA7
Deer
Poaching, WA10
Population on Forest Service Land, WA9
Forest Service, WA7
Wildlife Wardens, WA7, WA9
Muntjac Deer, WA9
Shooting Sports, WA6
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme: Funding, WA431
Roads: Noise Pollution, WA435

Gardiner, Mr Samuel
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 143
Oral Answers
Employment and Learning
Essential Skills for Living, 38
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health and Social Care Services: Review, 208
Regional Development
Exercise Watermill, 281
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 105
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 292
Written Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Fracking, WA298
Gas Reservoirs in Shale Deposits off Blackpool, WA298
Licences for Gas Exploration, WA374
Storing Natural Gas in the Salt Caverns Under Larne Lough, WA374
Environment
Single Use Carrier Bags, WA302

Gildernew, Ms Michelle
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 192
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 141
Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health and Social Care Services: Commissioning, 209–10
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 34
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 108–9, 109
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 287, 287–8, 288
Universities: Students' Community Background, 330–1, 331
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
DEL: Equality Training, WA46
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Fire and Rescue Service Budget, WA308
Regional Development
A5 Road Project, WA430

Girvan, Mr Paul
Oral Answers
Education
DE Capital Projects: South Antrim, 87
Written Answers
Education
South Antrim Area: School Bus Routes, WA27
Employment and Learning
Adult Apprenticeship Funding, WA41
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Foreign Direct Investment, WA195
Environment
Rivers: Pollution, WA301
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Intermediate Care, WA77
Regional Development
Footpath Resurfacing Schemes, WA110
Grit Boxes, WA110
Road Lighting Schemes, WA111
Traffic Calming Measures, WA110
Social Development
Boiler Replacement Scheme, WA259
Social Housing, WA259

Givan, Mr Paul
Adjournment
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 122–3, 123
Assembly Business
Public Petition: Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn, 247, 247–8
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 5
Oral Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, 274
Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 231, 231–2

Forensic Science Services, 19, 26–7, 27, 27–8
Maze Prison Site, 73–4, 74, 83
Pat Finucane Case, 150, 151, 151–2, 152
Prison Review: Final Report, 302–3, 303–4, 304, 317
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 295–6
Written Answers
Education
Post-16 Education Services for Young People with Moderate Learning Difficulties, WA167
South Eastern Education and Library Board, WA168
Support for Young People with Moderate Learning Difficulties, WA165
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Business Loans, WA301
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Foster Care: Promotion, WA414
Foster Parents, WA414
Knockmore Primary School, WA414
Smoking in Motor Vehicles, WA221
Justice
Complaints Against a Parole Commissioner, WA98
Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, WA224
Elderly People: Crimes Against, WA427
Parole Commissioners, WA319
Parole Process, WA98
Prison Population, WA423
Prison Service, WA428
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme: Funding, WA431

Hale, Mrs Brenda
Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 232–3, 233
Written Answers
Education
Children: Statemented, WA24
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Broadband in Annahilt, Co. Down, WA186

Hamilton, Mr Simon
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements
Economic Strategy, 409–10
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 395
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Road Safety, 132
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 50–1, 51–2, 57
Planning Enforcement, 205, 205–6, 206
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Strangford Lough Fishing Fleet, WA274
Environment
Illegally Dumped Waste, WA383
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, WA263
Smoking in Work Vehicles: Fines, WA410
Treatment Administered to EU Nationals, WA209
Justice
Level of Force that a Householder can use against an Intruder, WA95, WA423
Regional Development
A5 Road Project, WA327
Social Development
Motability, WA263
Motability Cars, WA330, WA331

Hilditch, Mr David
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Language Body, 69
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 47
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme: Funding, WA431
Social Development
Social Housing: Carrickfergus, WA439

Humphrey, Mr William
Adjournment
Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site, 370–1, 371, 372, 372–3, 373
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 148
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 46
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Community Arts: County Fermanagh, 351
Creative Industries, 353
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Tourism: Ulster Scots, 162
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, 277
Private Members' Business
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 366
Written Answers
Justice
Security: Community Buildings, WA319

Hussey, Mr Ross
Oral Answers
Environment
Septic Tanks, 159
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 55, 56–7, 57
Forensic Science Services, 22–3, 23
Agriculture and Rural Development
Flooding in the West Tyrone Constituency, WA147
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Public Library Standards, WA357
Education
Schools: Proposed Newbuilds, WA30
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Jobs Fund, WA300
Social Development
Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, WA437
Fuel Poverty, WA261
Fuel Poverty Report, WA263

Irwin, Mr William
Adjournment
Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh, 243–4
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 260–1, 261
Ministerial Statements
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 49
Oral Answers
Finance and Personnel
Rates: Business Premises, 93
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 181
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Gaelic Football Match between Carrickmore and Dromore: Violence, WA355
Regional Development
A5 Project, WA432
Car Parking in Housing Estates, WA112
Jackson's Corner, A27, WA433
Vehicles Entering Armagh City, WA113

Kelly, Mrs Dolores
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU financial Corrections, 260, 268–9, 269
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 397
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 195
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 148
Oral Answers
Environment
Septic Tanks, 160
Private Members' Business
Pat Finucane Case, 153
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Departmental Legislative Programme, WA142
Rural Proofing: Legislation, WA143
Rural White Paper Action Plan, WA15
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA133
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Lurgan Library, WA161
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA151
Education
Education and Skills Authority, WA36
School Transport, WA163
Employment and Learning
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA171
Environment
Local Councils, WA386
Staff, WA387
Waste Management Schemes, WA392
Finance and Personnel
Special EU Programmes Body, WA73
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Budget Review Group, WA3
Legislative Programme, WA129
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA127
Regional Development
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA233
Social Development
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA247

Kelly, Mr Gerry
Adjournment
Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site, 373–4, 374, 375, 377
Oral Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI: Performance, 165
Justice
Office of the Police Ombudsman: Criminal Justice Inspection Report, 217
Private Members' Business
Pat Finucane Case, 150–1, 167
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Líofa 2015, WA356
Education
Cross-border Schools, WA38

Kennedy, Mr Danny
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Roads and Transport, 129–30, 130, 131
Language Body, 70
Oral Answers
Regional Development
Altnagelvin Hospital: Transport from Fermanagh, 279
Drinking Water, 282, 283
Exercise Watermill, 281, 282
Footpaths: Backaderry Road, Leitrim, County Down, 280, 280–1, 281
Flood Prevention, 279, 280
Northern Ireland Water: Advice Leaflet, 283, 284
Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme, 284, 284–5, 285, 285–6, 286
Written Answers
Regional Development
A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass, WA323
A4/N16: Upgrade, WA328
A5
Project, WA324, WA327, WA431, WA432
Road Scheme, WA102
Funding, WA431, WA431–2
Accidents Resulting from Uneven Road Surfaces, WA325
Airport Passenger Numbers, WA103
Airport Shuttle Buses, WA244
Appointment of Special Advisers: Review, WA244
Arm's-length Bodies, WA111–12
Audio-visual Information Systems to Buses, WA107
Ballyquin Road to the Greystone Roundabout in Limavady: 30 mph Section, WA328
Belfast and Sligo: Road Links, WA328
Blue Badges, WA242, WA325
Brookeborough Roads Service Depot, WA106
Burning of Effigies in Roads Service Owned Car Parks, WA245–6
Bus Routes in North Down: Reduction in Services, WA244
Bus Service for Students from Queen's University to Derry, WA246
Car Parking
Charges, WA327
Housing Estates, WA112
Castlewellan Road in Banbridge, WA328–9
Cherrymount Link Road in Enniskillen, WA322
Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Line, WA105–6
Connecting Europe Facility, WA320–1, WA321
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA114
Cotton Area, North Down: Proposed Road Safety Measures, WA109
Daily Traffic Levels, WA112–13
Dannys Mill Road Area of Enniskillen: Raw Sewage, WA321
Departmental Spend, WA231–2
Derry City: Residents' Parking Scheme, WA114
DRD Property Clean-up, WA113–14
Dropped Kerb Schemes, WA102
Down Community Transport, WA104
Enniskillen Courthouse: Parking, WA322
Equality Schemes, WA114–15
Footpath Resurfacing Schemes, WA110
Footpaths, WA107
Ashfield Area of Donaghadee, WA107
Gortcorbies Climbing Lane Project on the A37, WA432
Grit Boxes, WA110
Gritting of Roads, WA322–3
Illegally Selling Cars on a Public Footpath or Road, WA109
Jackson's Corner, A27, WA433
Larne Railway, WA329
Londonderry to Coleraine Railway Line, WA104
Magilligan Ferry, WA323
Millennium Way in Lurgan, WA329
NI Water, WA105
Sewers and Pumping Stations, WA243
Unadopted Sewers and Pumping Stations, WA243
NSL Services Group, WA244
October Monitoring Round, WA111, WA112
Park-and-ride Facilities, WA432–3
Parking Enforcement Officers, WA434
Parking Tickets: Departmental Controlled Carpark, Ballymena, WA245
Phosphoric Acid in Drinking Water, WA324
Public Transport, WA108–9
Students, WA434–5
Winter Services, WA433
Young People, WA434
Quay Lane Car Park, Enniskillen, WA103–4
Road Lighting Schemes, WA111
Road Markings in the North Down Area, WA107
Roads
Economic Development, WA436
Noise Pollution, WA435
Resurfacing, WA436

Roads Service and the Rivers Agency: Collaboration, WA327
Salt and Grit Resources, WA242
Salt or Grit
Boxes, WA114
In Storage, WA324
Septic Tanks: Free Desludging, WA330
Sewerage Infrastructure Problems in the Millisle Area, WA106–7
Shuttle Bus Service Between Belfast and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, WA105
Secondments, WA326
Speed Limits, WA326
Spencer Street Area of Holywood: Weed Problems, WA106
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA233–42
Strangford Constituency
Unadopted Pumping Stations, WA320, WA429, WA430
Unadopted Roads, WA245
Unadopted Sewers, WA320, WA429
Travel Costs, WA324
Traffic Calming Measures, WA110
Blackskull Junction, WA430
Translink
Budget Plans, WA104
Co-ordinated Timetables, WA243
Maintenance Work on Buses, WA326
New Rolling Stock, WA109
Staff, WA329
Travel Ticket for People with Disabilities, WA115
Unadopted Sewers and Pumping Stations, WA428
Vehicles Entering Armagh City, WA113

Kinahan, Mr Danny
Executive Committee Business
Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, 13–14
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 411
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Environment, 251
Road Safety, 133
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
GAA: Tyrone Centre of Excellence, 350
Employment and Learning
DEL: Shared Future, 38
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Shale Gas Fracturing, 164
Finance and Personnel
Rates: Business Premises, 94
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Dementia Strategy, 211
Justice
Resettlement of Offenders, 215
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 177
Car Tax Renewal, 53–4
Community Pharmacies, 110
Planning Enforcement, 200–01, 201
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Departmental Legislative Programme, WA145
Education
Lifelong Learning: People with Learning Disabilities, WA36
Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim, WA277

Lewis, Ms Pam
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 195
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 142
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 107–8
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 289–90, 290
Written Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Broadband: South Antrim, WA300
Social Development
Social Housing: Carbon Monoxide Detectors, WA438

Lo, Ms Anna
Executive Committee Business
Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, 12–13
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 409
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Environment, 249
Inland Waterways, 64
Language Body, 68
Prison Service Review, 8
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 46
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Cross-departmental Links, 353
Education
Ethnic Minorities: Barriers to Education, 89

Employment and Learning
DEL: Shared Future, 37
Environment
Septic Tanks, 157
Social Development
Fuel Poverty, 343–4
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 178–9, 179
Car Tax Renewal, 54–5, 55
Planning Enforcement, 202
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Theatres and Theatre-going: Promotion, WA353
Education
Amalgamation of Primary Schools in South Belfast, WA165
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
MTV European Music Awards Aftershow Events, WA292
Wind Turbines, WA299
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
MRI Scanner for the Clark Clinic in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, WA214
Physiotherapy Graduates, WA214
Justice
Delivery of Non-molestation Orders, WA231

Lunn, Mr Trevor
Adjournment
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 121–2, 122
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements
Economic Strategy, 405–6
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 395
Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 225–7, 228, 234
Forensic Science Services, 19–20, 20
Maze Prison Site, 75, 75–6, 76

Lynch, Mr Seán
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Roads and Transport, 130
Prison Service Review, 9
Oral Answers
Social Development
Motability Cars, 344
Private Members' Business
Forensic Science Services, 18–19
Prison Review: Final Report, 301–2
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Libraries: Rural Areas, WA356
Lisnaskea Library, WA21-2
Education
Preschool Education, WA38
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report, WA299
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Mental Health Act: Legislation, WA307
Occupational Therapists, WA77
Prescriptions: Charges for Dosage Monitoring Systems, WA220
Regional Development
Brookeborough Roads Service Depot, WA106
Public Transport: Winter Services, WA433

Lyttle, Mr Chris
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements:
Economic Strategy, 412
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 391
Oral Answers
Education
DE Circular 1979/10: 'Greater Involvement of Young People in the Youth Service', 90
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust, 208
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Child Poverty, 278
Dealing with the Past, 29
Private Members' Business
Universities: Students' Community Background, 324–5, 339–40
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Sport Matters Strategy, WA277
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Kinship Care NI, WA395
Podiatry Care, WA309
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Child Poverty, WA125, WA128
Flags Protocol Review Group, WA125
Social Investment Fund: Consultation, WA270

McCallister, Mr John
Adjournment
Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh, 243
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 395, 398

Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 193
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 141
Oral Answers
Environment
National Park, 156
Justice
Antisocial Behaviour, 218
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, 275, 276
Private Members' Business
Prison Review: Final Report, 310
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 270, 270–1, 271, 287, 289, 290, 291, 293
Written Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Fire and Rescue Service: Cuts, WA216
Protect Life Strategy, WA82
Public Consultation on a UK Plan for Rare Diseases, WA307
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Regeneration of Former Security Sites, WA2
Social Investment Fund, WA1

McCann, Mr Fra
Written Answers
Social Development
Welfare Reform, WA438

McCann, Ms Jennifer
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 145
Prison Service Review, 8
Oral Answers
Environment
Septic Tanks, 156
Justice
Office of the Police Ombudsman: Criminal Justice Inspection Report, 216
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, 277
Private Members' Business
Forensic Science Services, 21, 22
Pat Finucane Case, 167
Prison Review: Final Report, 308–9, 309

McCarthy, Mr Kieran
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 260, 261, 262, 264, 264–5, 266, 269
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 194
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 147
Prison Service Review, 7
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Funding, 351, 352
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Shale Gas Fracturing, 164
Justice
Resettlement of Offenders, 215
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Social Investment Fund: Consultation, 34
Regional Development
Footpaths: Backaderry Road, Leitrim, County Down, 281
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 106–7, 107, 109
Maze Prison Site, 99
Planning Enforcement, 197, 203, 223
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 288–9, 289
Written Answers
Education
Primary 1 Pupils: Free School Meals, WA367
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Smart Grid Technology, WA291–2
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Firefighters: Hot Fire Training, WA215
Social Development
Antrim Town Area: Supported "Fold Type" Housing, WA332

McCartney, Mr Raymond
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 394
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 6
Oral Answers
Justice
Antisocial Behaviour, 218
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 80, 80–1, 81
Pat Finucane Case, 172–3, 173, 173–4, 174
Prison Review: Final Report, 318–20
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
Step Ahead Programme, WA282

Applications, WA368
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Generic Drugs, WA308–9
Private Care Homes, WA82, WA83
Regional Development
Derry City: Residents' Parking Scheme, WA114

McCausland, Mr Nelson
Adjournment
Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site, 376–7, 377, 377–9, 379
Oral Answers
Social Development
Alcohol Pricing, 346, 346–7, 347
Boiler Replacement Scheme, 347, 348
Fuel Poverty, 342, 342–3, 343, 344
Motability Cars, 344, 345
Welfare Reform, 345, 346
Written Answers
Social Development
Antrim Town Area: Supported "Fold Type" Housing, WA332
Ards Peninsula: Areas at Risk, WA334
Assisted Voluntary Sales Schemes, WA262
Atos Origin: Remuneration, WA436
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, WA263
Bloomfield Estate, Bangor: Pensioners' Bungalows, WA266
Boiler Replacement Scheme, WA259, WA260, WA334–5
and Warm Homes Scheme, WA121
Boiler Scrappage Scheme, WA246
Cairngorm Drive and Shanlea Drive, Larne: Flats, WA262
Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, WA437
Community Groups: Funding, WA119
Co-ownership Housing Applications, WA246
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA119
Demolishing Unwanted Flats and Houses, WA261
Department Spend, WA119
Department's Budget, WA331
Disability Living Allowance, WA263
Discretionary Housing Payment, WA265
Double Glazing Scheme, WA335
Energy Brokering Report, WA334
Enniskillen and Newry: Cross-border Trade, WA331–2
Equality Schemes, WA118
Fuel Poverty, WA120, WA257, WA261
Report, WA263
Gambling Laws, WA264
Girdwood Site, North Belfast: Loss of 200 Housing Units, WA261
Green New Deal, WA265
Halifax Savers Prize Draw, WA266
Helm Housing Association Interim Report, WA265
Housing Associations
Funding, WA117
Pursuit of Funds, WA266
Housing Benefit Fraud, WA264
Housing Executive
Properties: Maintenance Schemes, WA257–8
Staff, WA117
Vacant Houses, WA440
Housing Stress, WA116
Incapacity Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance, WA120
Jobseeker's Allowance, WA118
Loughview Estate, Holywood, WA117
Mortgage Relief Scheme, WA119
Motability, WA263
Cars, WA330–1, WA331
Neighbourhood Renewal: Capital Projects, WA441
Newbuild and Maintenance Projects, WA332
North Street flats, Newry, WA437
October Monitoring Round, WA260
Oil Stamp Saving Schemes, WA261
Patients Diagnosed with Cancer, WA259–60
Pension Credit
Branch, WA115, WA115–16, WA116
Claimants in North Down, WA262–3
Small Pockets of Deprivation, WA264
Social Housing, WA259
Carbon Monoxide Detectors, WA438
Carrickfergus, WA439–40
East Londonderry, WA439
Social Landlords, WA333
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA247–56
Strategic Review of Gambling Policy, Practice and Law, WA257
Temperature Variances, WA334
Travel Costs, WA330
Urban Development Grant Scheme, WA264
Vacant Houses, WA116–17
Voluntary and Community Sector, WA440
Concordat with the Northern Ireland Government, WA437
Welfare Reform, WA256–7, WA438–9
Implications on Future Poverty and Deprivation, WA256
Winter Fuel Payment, WA117

McClarty, Mr David
Private Members' Business
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 296, 298, 300
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
Integrating Colleges, WA40
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: Contact, WA193
Directive 200/35/EC, WA49
Directive 2011/7/EU, WA194
Environment
Local Councils: Number of, WA60
Finance and Personnel
Directive 200/35/EC, WA69
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Causeway Hospital: Maternity Services, WA93
Cost of Prescriptions Issued and Dispensed, WA217
Intensive Care Units and Neo-natal Units: Staff, WA400, WA405
Prescription Charges: Annual Income, WA218
Supplier Invoices, WA81
Regional Development
Magilligan Ferry, WA323

McCrea, Mr Basil
Adjournment
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 120–1, 121
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 6
Oral Answers
Justice
Office of the Police Ombudsman: Criminal Justice Inspection Report, 217
Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 237
Forensic Science Services, 19
Pat Finucane Case, 152, 153
Prison Review: Final Report, 306, 306–7, 307, 310, 316
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 270, 289, 296, 299–300, 300, 300-1
Universities: Students' Community Background, 334–5, 335
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
Lifelong Learning: Young People with Severe Learning Disabilities, WA184
Universities: Research Funding, WA44
Social Development
Voluntary and Community Sector: Concordat with the Northern Ireland Government, WA437

McCrea, Mr Ian
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 412
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Creative Industries, 353
Employment and Learning
Northern Regional College: Magherafelt Campus, 40
Environment
National Park, 155
Finance and Personnel
EU Financial Transaction Tax, 97
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Investment Strategy, 30
Private Members' Business
Pat Finucane Case, 152–3
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Moneymore Library, WA162
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Child Order Statistics, WA309
Prescription Drugs, WA312
Justice
Desertcreat Training College: Tender Specification, WA96
Regional Development
Roads: Resurfacing, WA435
Translink: Maintenance Work on Buses, WA326

McDevitt, Mr Conall
Adjournment
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 124
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 144, 146, 147
Prison Service Review, 8
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Sport: Volunteering, 349
Education
DE Circular 1979/10: 'Greater Involvement of Young People in the Youth Service', 90
Employment and Learning
St Mary's University College, Belfast, 35
Finance and Personnel
EU Financial Transaction Tax, 97
Justice
Office of the Police Ombudsman: Criminal Justice Inspection Report, 216–17

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Budget: October Monitoring Round, 273
Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 230, 230–1, 231, 238
Forensic Science Services, 17–18, 20, 27
Pat Finucane Case, 167, 170–1, 171, 172
Prison Review: Final Report, 303, 310–11, 311
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Ashton Park, Finaghy: Undesignated Watercourse, WA147
Education
Enhanced Redundancy Package for Teachers, WA23
Environment
EU Directive 2009/113/EC, WA384
Regional Development
Phosphoric Acid in Drinking Water, WA324

McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 389, 390
Economic Strategy, 407–8
Oral Answers
Regional Development
Flood Prevention, 279, 279–80
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Department Spend, WA132
Culture, Arts and Leisure
DCAL: Spending Controls, WA357
Department Spend, WA19
Education
Belfast City Council: Spend, WA28
Employment and Learning
Department Spend, WA40
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Belfast City Council Area: Spend, WA190
Finance and Personnel
Departmental Spend, WA205
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Department Spend, WA92
Justice
Department Spend, WA100
Regional Development
Departmental Spend, WA231
Social Development
Department Spend, WA119

McElduff, Mr Barry
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements
Economic Strategy, 405
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 393
Oral Answers
Environment
National Park, 155
Private Members' Business
Aggregates Levy, 185–6, 186–7
Universities: Students' Community Background, 327–8, 328, 334
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
Shuttle Bus Service Between Belfast and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, WA39, WA105

McGimpsey, Mr Michael
Adjournment
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 124–5, 125
Written Answers
Employment and Learning
English for Speakers of Other Languages, WA42
Finance and Personnel
Civil Service Staff, WA74
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Accident and Emergency Services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Area, WA92
Health Service: Pay Bill, WA91
Minister's Overseas Trips, WA211
Prescribing Formulary for Drugs: Development of, WA91

McGlone, Mr Patsy
Committee Business
EU Financial Corrections, 259, 260
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 411–12
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Environment, 252
Language Body, 69–70
Road Safety, 136
Oral Answers
Education
DE Capital Projects: South Antrim, 87
Environment
Septic Tanks, 157

Justice
Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme, 214
Social Development
Fuel Poverty, 342
Private Members' Business
Aggregates Levy, 177–8, 178
Car Tax Renewal, 54
Planning enforcement, 206–7, 207
Universities: Students' Community Background, 338–9, 339
Written Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI, WA50
Environment
Proposed Capital Spend Projects, WA61
Finance and Personnel
Centre of Procurement Expertise, WA72
Consultancy Firms, WA73
Jobs, WA71
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Speech and Language Therapy
Therapists, WA418
Waiting List, WA418
Social Development
Welfare Reform, WA256
Implications on Future Poverty and Deprivation, WA256

McGuinness, Mr Martin
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 384–7, 389, 390–1, 391–2, 392–3, 393, 394, 395, 396–7, 397
Written Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Arm's-length Bodies, WA131
Value for Money Audits, WA339
Asset Management Unit, WA339
Ballykelly: Former Army Barracks Site, WA125
Capital Investment Projects: Shortfalls, WA339
Childcare
Fund, WA270–1
Strategy, WA126
Child Poverty, WA125, WA128
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA130
Cost of Equality Schemes, WA129
Flags Protocol Review Group, WA125–6
Historical Institutional Abuse: Inquiry, WA269
Junior Ministers, WA130
Legislative Programme, WA129
For the Executive, WA131
Ministerial Subcommittee for Children and Young People, WA129–30
October Monitoring Round, WA126
Planning Appeals Commission, WA269–70
Programme for Government, WA131
Social Investment Fund, WA131, WA270
Consultation, WA270
Special Advisers, WA127
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA127–8
Strategic Investment Board, WA340
Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People, WA129, WA130

McIlveen, Mr David
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 404
Oral Answers
Education
Ethnic Minorities: Barriers to Education, 89
Environment
Planning Applications, 158
Social Development
Welfare Reform, 345
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 57, 57–8
Community Pharmacies, 111–12, 112
Forensic Science Services, 20, 21
Written Answers
Education
Framework for Language Teaching and Learning in Schools, WA28
Employment and Learning
Second Languages, WA175
Transport Difficulties Faced by Students in Bad Weather, WA176
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Corporate Bonds, WA48
Environment
Theft of Metals from Buildings, WA383
Finance and Personnel
EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, WA306
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Post-traumatic Rape Syndrome, WA220
Justice
Human Trafficking Legislation, WA426
Social Development
Assisted Voluntary Sales Schemes, WA262
Green New Deal, WA265
Social Landlords, WA332

McIlveen, Miss Michelle
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Economic Strategy, 409

Inland Waterways, 63–4
Language Body, 67
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Salmon Conservation, 348
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts in the Strangford Constituency, WA276
Association Football in the Strangford Constituency, WA163
Libraries in the Strangford Constituency, WA344
Strangford Constituency: Sharing of Sports Facilities, WA161
Strangford Lough: Promotion of Sporting Activities, WA160
Ulster Museum: Post-project Evaluation, WA161
World Police and Fire Games 2013, WA159
Education
Sports Teaching Programme, WA 280
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Care Homes
Accidents, WA78, WA80
Inspections, WA79, WA80
Misconduct by Staff, WA78
Serious Injury to a Resident, WA79, WA80
Welfare of Residents, WA79
Children in Care, WA416, WA417
DHSSPS: Joined-up Working, WA311
Foster Carers, WA421
Kinship Care Arrangements, WA415
Kinship Care, WA415, WA417, WA420
Kinship Carers, WA416
Justice
Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum, WA230
Regional Development
Adopted Pumping Stations in the Strangford Constituency, WA430
NI Water Sewers and Pumping Stations, WA243
NI Water Unadopted Sewers and Pumping Stations, WA243
Strangford Constituency
Unadopted Pumping Stations, WA320
Unadopted Roads, WA245
Unadopted Sewers, WA320
Unadopted Pumping Stations in the Strangford Constituency, WA429
Unadopted Sewers and Pumping Stations, WA428
Unadopted Sewers in the Strangford Constituency, WA428, WA429

McKay, Mr Daithí
Oral Answers
Education
Redburn Primary School, Holywood, 92
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Social Investment Fund: Consultation, 34
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 52, 53
Community Pharmacies, 102–103, 104,
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report, WA271
Assembly Commission
Members' Pension Funds, WA122, WA441
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Gaeilge and Gáidhlig Speakers: Links, WA148
Gaelic Games: Coverage on Television and Radio, WA351
Gaelic Games: Coverage, WA352
Ulster Canal, WA344
Education
Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena, WA33
Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle, WA32
GCSE Grades, WA169
Irish-medium Education Report, WA31, WA165, WA278
Our Lady of Lourdes High School, Ballymoney, WA31
Pupils Attending Grammar and Non-grammar Schools, WA360, WA361
Queen's University Research on Irish-medium Schools, WA168
St Paul's College, Kilrea, WA34
Employment and Learning
US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership, WA282
Young People's Learning Agency, WA44
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report, WA287, WA288, WA380
Ambulance Based in Ballycastle, WA420
Current Businesses, WA190
Foreign Direct Investment, WA194
Gaelic Athletic Association, WA375
Gaelic Games Events: Promotion, WA197
Gaelic Games: Tourist Potential, WA197
Grants, WA191
InterTradeIreland
Acumen Programme, WA293
All-island Innovation Programme, WA293
Elevate Programme, WA292
Fusion Programme, WA292

Go-2-Tender Programme, WA289
Innova Programme, WA294
Programmes, WA288
South Antrim, WA289
Invest NI: Funding for Non-indigenous Businesses, WA192
Local Anniversaries, WA290
Loyal Order Events: Promotion, WA197
O2 Mobile Phone Coverage in Cloughmills, WA380
Strategic Energy Framework, WA300
Tourist Board, WA376
Tourist Board's Masterclass on Sponsorship, WA374, WA375
Environment
Single Wind Turbines and Wind Farms: Applications, WA65
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Ambulance Provision in Ballycastle, WA420, WA421
Social Development
Energy Brokering Report, WA334

McKevitt, Mrs Karen
Ministerial Statements
Culture, Arts and Leisure
North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways, 64
North/South Ministerial Council: Language Body, 69
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Community Arts: County Fermanagh, 351
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust, 208
Justice
Antisocial Behaviour, 219
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Common Agricultural Policy, 32
Regional Development
Footpaths: Backaderry Road, Leitrim, County Down, 281
Social Development
Motability Cars, 344
Private Members' Business
Mobile phones: Roaming Charges, 363–4
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 293–4
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, WA346
2012 Olympic Games Training Camp Agreements, WA345
2012 Olympic Games, WA347
2012 Olympics: Talent Identification and Development, WA346
Irish Language Legislation, WA162
Library Opening Hours, WA350
Employment and Learning
European Social Fund, WA185
Regional Development
Roads Service and the Rivers Agency: Collaboration, WA326
Social Development
Neighbourhood Renewal: Capital Projects, WA441

McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel
Ministerial Statements
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 391
Oral Answers
Education
DE Capital Projects: South Antrim, 87
Finance and Personnel
Rates: Business Premises, 94
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Dealing with the Past, 29
Private Members' Business
Mobile phones: Roaming Charges, 357, 363
Pat Finucane Case, 168
Written Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Feed-in Tariff Scheme for Renewable Energy, WA198
Planning Application T/2010/0238, WA199–200, WA201, WA202
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Air Travel: Costs, WA419–420
Social Development
Boiler Replacement Scheme and Warm Homes Scheme, WA120

McMullan, Mr Oliver
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU financial Corrections, 261–2, 262
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways, 65
North/South Ministerial Council: Language Body, 69
Oral Answers
Finance and Personnel
EU Structural Funds: East Antrim, 94–5, 95
Private Members' Business
Car tax Renewal, 52–3

Written Answers
Regional Development
Septic Tanks: Free Desludging, WA329–330

McNarry, Mr David
Ministerial Statements
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 392
Oral Answers
Education
Ethnic Minorities: Barriers to Education, 89
Justice
Police: Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme, 214
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Commissioner for Children and Young People, 32
Social Development
Welfare Reform, 345
Private Members' Business
Private Members' Business: Education and Skills Authority, 229, 230
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Museums Policy, WA358
Education
School
Buildings, WA364
Buses, WA164
Estate, WA168, WA367
Property: Total Value, WA169
Property: Value, WA360
Viability Audit Process, WA362
Spaces on Local Education Buses, WA164

McQuillan, Mr Adrian
Ministerial Statements
Public expenditure: 2011–12 October Monitoring, 45
Oral Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI: East Londonderry, 163
Private Members' Business
Universities: Students' Community Background, 340–1
Written Answers
Environment
Local Government: Review of Public Administration, WA305
Finance and Personnel
Land and Property Services, WA395
Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit: Department of Education, WA76
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Motivate Programme, WA92
Justice
Prisoners: Annual Cost, WA318

Maginness, Mr Alban
Adjournment
Housing: Girdwood Barracks Site, 370, 371, 372, 374, 403–404
Ministerial Statements
Economic Strategy,
Prison Service Review, 7
Oral Answers
Finance and Personnel
EU Structural Funds: East Antrim, 95
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Child Poverty, 277
Dealing with the Past, 28, 29
Private Members' Business
Forensic Science Services, 26
Maze prison Site, 72, 83, 99, 99–100
Pat Finucane Case, 149–150, 150, 152, 154, 167, 169
Prison Review: Final Report, 304–306, 306, 312
Written Answers
Education
Home-to-school Transport, WA123
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Homecoming Year for Northern Ireland, WA286
The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming, WA287
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Cedar Lodge School, Belfast: Occupational Therapist, WA310
Social Development
Girdwood Site, North Belfast: Loss of 200 Housing Units, WA261

Maskey, Mr Alex
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 146, 147
Oral Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, 275
Private Members' Business
Pat Finucane Case, 151
Written Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, WA299

Regional Development
Public Transport: Young People, WA434

Maskey, Mr Paul
Ministerial Statements
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 46
Oral Answers
Education
DE Circular 1979/10: 'Greater Involvement of Young People in the Youth Service', 91
Employment and Learning
St Mary's University College, Belfast, 35
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Dementia Strategy, 210
Justice
Office of the Police Ombudsman, 219
Private Members' Business
Mobile phones: Roaming Charges, 368, 369
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Sector: Funding, WA354
Social Development
Helm Housing Association Interim Report, WA265

Molloy, Mr Francie
Executive Committee Business
Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, 13
Oral Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Commissioner for Children and Young People, 33
Employment and Learning
DEL: Shared Future, 37–8
Social Development
Fuel Poverty, 343
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 78
Written Answers
Education
Schools: Viability, WA35
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Biomass District Heating System in Camphill Community, WA196
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Anti-TNF Drugs, WA221
Social Development
Incapacity Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance, WA119

Molloy, Mr Francie (as Principal Deputy Speaker)
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 147
Private Members' Business
Pat Finucane Case, 149

Lord Morrow
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Road Safety, 135
North/South Ministerial Council
Roads and Transport, 131
Prison Review: Final Report, 311, 311–12, 312
Prison Service Review, 10
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 55, 55–6, 56, 57
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Brucellosis Control Order (Northern Ireland) 2004: BT40 Notices, WA144
Disposal of Animals and Animal By-products, WA8
Farmers, WA12
Flood Area Hotspots, WA273
Flooding Caused by Rivers Bursting Their Banks, WA16
Flooding in the South Tyrone and Clogher Valley Areas, WA273
Herd Register, WA273
Culture, Arts and Leisure
GAA: Alleged Sectarianism, WA162
Gaelic Football Match between Carrickmore and Dromore: Violence, WA356
Education
Contract Lease iPads, WA25, WA26
Teachers: Sick Leave, WA26
Employment and Learning
Moving Up Programme, WA184
St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast, WA38
St Mary's University College, Belfast, WA171, WA174
Applications, WA183
Board of Governors, WA181, WA368
Environment
Environmental Damage Caused by Fuel Laundering, WA203
Planning Service, WA382
Scrap Metal Dealers, WA383
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Alcohol Abuse, WA310
Removal of Sectarian Tattoos, WA214, WA219

UK Citizenship, WA221
Justice
Absolute Discharge, WA427
Bench Warrants, WA94, WA424
Children Who Commit a Criminal Offence, WA313
Colin Duffy, WA424
Conditional Discharge, WA99, WA421
Convictions for Corporate Manslaughter, WA95
Custodial Sentences, WA98
Disruptive Behaviour During Court Sittings, WA225
European Arrest Warrants, WA230
Gerry McGeough, WA97
Glorification of Terrorism, WA315
Judicial System: Balance of Human Rights, WA230
Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, WA225, WA315
Legal Aid, WA317
Cost, WA422
Maghaberry Prison: Disturbance at Roe House, WA96, WA97, WA99
Prisoners, WA316
Prisoners on Remand, WA315
Prison Officers: Sick Leave, WA224
Released Prisoners, WA96
Robert Black, WA317
Secrecy in Civil Courts, WA226
Secretary of State for Justice: Proposals, WA316
Sentencing: Previous Convictions, WA226
Separated Prisoners, WA96, WA313
Separated Republican Prisoners, WA99, WA226, WA317
Separated Republican Prisoners' Protest, WA228, WA229, WA230
Uninsured Drivers, WA317

Moutray, Mr Stephen
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 406
Private Members' Business
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 361–2, 368–9, 369
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Library Provision in Gilford, County Down, WA355
Education
Líofa 2015, WA359
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
At Risk Register, WA306
Justice
Sex Offender Notification and Violent Offender Orders, WA318
Regional Development
Gritting of Roads, WA322
Parking Enforcement Officers, WA433

Murphy, Mr Conor
Adjournment
Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh, 240, 240–2
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 257–8, 258
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 389
Ministerial Statements
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 45

Nesbitt, Mr Mike
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 405
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Creative Industries, 352, 352–3
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Dealing with the Past, 29
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 79–80, 80
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 358, 359
Pat Finucane Case, 169–70, 170
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Cost of Equality Schemes, WA144
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Equality Schemes, WA22
Education
Equality Schemes, WA26
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Cost of Equality Schemes, WA196
Finance and Personnel
Equality Schemes, WA73
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Cost of Equality Schemes, WA129
Regional Development
Equality Schemes, WA114
Social Development
Equality Schemes, WA118

Newton, Mr Robin
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 407

Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health and Social Care Services: Commissioning, 209
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 98–9, 99
Mobile phones: Roaming Charges, 356, 357, 358
Written Answers
Environment
Better Regulation, WA303

Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Inland Waterways, 63, 64, 65, 66
Language Body, 66–7, 67–8, 68, 69, 70
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Funding, 351, 351–2, 352
Community Arts: County Fermanagh, 351
Creative Industries, 352, 353
Cross-departmental Links, 353, 353–4
GAA: Tyrone Centre of Excellence, 350, 350–1
Salmon Conservation, 348, 348–9
Sport: Volunteering, 349, 349–50
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, WA346, WA347, WA347–8
Talent Identification and Development, WA346–7
Training Camp Agreements, WA345–6
All-Ireland Soccer Team, WA354
Appointment of Special Advisers, WA20, WA163
Arm's-length Bodies, WA19
Arts Council's Annual Support for Organisations Programme, WA354
Arts in the North Down Constituency, WA359
Arts in the Strangford Constituency, WA276–7
Arts Sector: Funding, WA354
Association Football, WA17
Association Football in the Strangford Constituency, WA163
Ballymoney Library, WA19
Centenary of the Birth of Myles na gCopaleen, WA157
Community Festivals Fund, WA277, WA356
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA21
Cultural Tourism, WA16–17
DCAL: Spending Controls, WA357
Department Spend, WA19
Equality Impact Assessments, WA18
Equality Schemes, WA22
European Union: Infraction Fines, WA348
Film Tax Credits, WA18
Fisheries Act 1966, WA351
Fish Poaching in Inland Waterways, WA20
GAA: Alleged Sectarianism, WA162
Gaeilge and Gáidhlig Speakers: Links, WA148–51
Gaelic Football Match between Carrickmore and Dromore: Violence, WA355, WA356
Gaelic Games: Coverage on Television and Radio, WA351, WA352
Gilford Library, WA157
Hydraulic Fracturing, WA344
Ilex Regeneration Programme, WA350–1
Indigenous Languages Strategy, WA348
Irish Language Broadcast Fund, WA18
Irish Language Legislation, WA162
Irish-language Organisations, WA348
Libraries in the Strangford Constituency, WA344–5
Libraries: Rural Areas, WA356–7
Libraries: Wireless Internet Service, WA276
Library Fines, WA21
Library Opening Hours, WA350
North Down, WA158–9
Library Provision in Gilford, County Down, WA355, WA355–6
Líofa 2015, WA148, WA356
Lisnaskea Library, WA22
Lottery Funding to the 2012 Olympics, WA277
Lough Neagh
Fish Caught, WA349–50
Fishing Nets, WA349
Fish Population, WA350
Illegal Netting of Fish, WA349
Lurgan Library, WA162
Mobile Library Service, WA276, WA344
Moneymore Library, WA162
Museums Policy, WA358
Odyssey Trust Company Limited, WA23, WA345
Directors and Staff, WA275–6
Report, WA352
Olympic Sized Swimming Pool in Bangor, WA23
Public Library Standards, WA21, WA357
Sharing of Sports Facilities in North Down, WA353–4
Sport Matters Capital and Equipment Awards Programme, WA353
Sport Matters Strategy, WA277
Sport: Participation, WA357–8
Sports: Funding, WA22
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA151–7

Strangford Constituency: Sharing of Sports Facilities, WA161
Strangford Lough: Promotion of Sporting Activities, WA160
Theatres and Theatre-going: Promotion, WA353
Tourism Potential of Canals, WA352–3
Travel Costs, WA157
Ulster Canal, WA344
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, WA352
Ulster Museum: Post-project Evaluation, WA161
Ulster-Scots Agency: Board, WA20
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund, WA17, WA18
Ulster-Scots Community, WA351
World Pipe Band Championships, WA358
World Police and Fire Games, WA358-9

Ó hOisín, Mr Cathal
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Inland Waterways, 64
Language Body, 68
Roads and transport, 131
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Sport: Volunteering, 349
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Invest NI: East Londonderry, 164
Finance and Personnel
Rates: Empty Properties, 96
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DHSSPS: Budget 2011-12, 213
Regional Development
Exercise Watermill, 282

O'Dowd, Mr John
Adjournment
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 125, 126–7, 127–8
Oral Answers
Education
DE Capital Projects: South Antrim, 87, 87–8
DE Circular 1979/10: 'Greater Involvement of Young People in the Youth Service', 90, 90–1, 91
Ethnic Minorities: Barriers to Education, 89, 89–90
Home-to-school Transport, 88, 88–9
Redburn Primary School, Holywood, 91, 91–2, 92
Schools: Area Planning, 92–3, 93
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Commissioner for Children and Young People, 32, 33
Common Agricultural Policy, 31–2. 32
Dealing with the Past, 28–9, 29, 29–30
Investment Strategy, 30, 31
Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, 34, 35
Social Investment Fund: Consultation, 33, 33–4, 34
Private Members' Business
Education and Skills Authority, 235–7, 237, 238, 239
Written Answers
Education
Amalgamation of Primary Schools in South Belfast, WA165
Appointment of Special Advisers, WA34
Area Learning Community Programme Participation, WA169–70
Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College: Land, WA366–7
Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, WA281
Bangor Grammar School, WA27
Sport Pitches, WA29
Belfast City Council: Spend, WA28
Belfast Education and Library Board: Educational Psychology Service, WA38
Capital Budget, WA278–9
Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena, WA33–4
Central Primary School, Bangor, WA361
Children: Statemented, WA24–5
Computer Science, WA25
Contract Lease iPads, WA25–6, WA26
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA29
Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle, WA32–3
Cross-border Schools, WA38
Draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy, WA26, WA28
Education and Skills Authority, WA36
Education Maintenance Allowance, WA279
Enhanced Redundancy Package for Teachers, WA24
Entitlement Framework, WA363
Equality Schemes, WA27
Framework for Language Teaching and Learning in Schools, WA28
Free School Meals, WA35
GCSE Grades, WA169
Home-to-school Transport, WA123
In-year Budgetary Position, WA366
Irish-medium Education Report, WA31, WA165, WA278

Lifelong Learning: People with Learning Disabilities, WA36–7
Líofa 2015, WA359
Modern Language: A Level, WA30
Modern Languages, WA29–30
Newbuilds:
Lack of Funding, WA170
Priority Order, WA170
Scheduled to Commence by 2015, WA170
Newbuilds for Schools, WA364
Our Lady of Lourdes High School, Ballymoney, WA31–2
Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim, WA278
Post-16 Education Services for Young People with Moderate Learning Difficulties, WA167
Post-16 Education Services for Young People with Severe Learning Difficulties, WA167
Preschool Education, WA38
Primary 1 Pupils: Free School Meals, WA367
Primary Schools: Cost of Repairs, WA279–80
Priorities for Youth Document, WA281
Private Sector Bus Companies, WA24
Pupils Attending Grammar and Non-grammar Schools, WA360, WA361
Queen's University Research on Irish-medium Schools, WA168
Rural Schools, WA37
St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge, WA367
St Paul's College, Kilrea, WA34–5
School Buildings, WA364–6
School Buses, WA164
School Property:
Total Value, WA169
Value, WA360
School Transport, WA163–4
Schools:
Budget for Newbuilds, WA281
Estate, WA168, WA368
Proposed Newbuilds, WA30–1
Viability, WA35–6
Viability Audit Process, WA362
South Antrim Area: School Bus Routes, WA27
South Eastern Education and Library Board, WA168
Spaces on Local Education Buses, WA164
Special Advisers, WA23
Sports Teaching Programme, WA280
Support for Young People with Moderate Learning Difficulties, WA166–7
Teachers:
on Medical Suspension, WA363–4
Sick Leave, WA26
Suspensions, WA366
Transfer 2011 Application Forms, WA362
Transporting Pupils between Schools: Cost, WA363
Travel Costs, WA165
Viability Audit, WA27
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ballykelly: Former Army Barracks Site, WA3
Budget Review Group, WA3
Executive Office in Brussels, WA1–2
October Monitoring Round, WA2
Regeneration of Former Security Sites, WA2
Review of Public Administration, WA4
Social Investment Fund, WA1, WA3
Strategic Investment Board
Members, WA2
United States of America: Links with, WA3–4

O'Neill, Mrs Michelle
Revised Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Anaerobic Digestion Plants, RWA1
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Agricultural Wages Board, WA271, WA275
Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report, WA271
Alien Muntjac Deer, Chinese Water Deer and Roe Deer, WA7
Appointment of Special Advisers, WA16
Ards Peninsula Area: Farms, WA273
Area VII under the Western Waters, WA13
Arm's-length Bodies, WA11
Ashton Park, Finaghy: Undesignated Watercourse, WA147
Assistance for People Living and Working in Rural Areas, WA6
Ban on Animals in Circuses, WA142
Belfast Telegraph Advertisement, WA133
Brucellosis Control Order (Northern Ireland) 2004: BT40 Notices, WA144–5
CAP Reform, WA343
Committee on Climate Change Report, WA340–1
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA15
Cost of Equality Schemes, WA144
Deer Management Partnership, WA7
Deer:
Poaching, WA10
Population on Forest Service Land, WA9
Departmental Legislative Programme, WA143, WA145
Departmental Spend, WA132
Department's Independent Panel, WA10, WA341

Disposal of Animals and Animal By-products, WA9
Energy Prices, WA132
Equality Impact Assessments, WA11
European Grants, WA146–7
European Union Subsidy Payments, WA271–2, WA272
Farmers, WA12–13
Financial Facilities to Assist Farmers, WA132
Fish Quota Allocations, WA272
Flood Area Hotspots, WA273
Floodbank Adjacent to The Meadows, Ballymoney, WA11
Flooding:
Beragh, County Tyrone, WA341, WA342, WA343
Caused by Rivers Bursting their Banks, WA16
Compensation to Farmers, WA143–4
Damaged Premises in Tempo, WA274
Review, WA343
South Tyrone and Clogher Valley Areas, WA273
West Tyrone Constituency, WA147
Forestry Grant Scheme: East Londonderry, WA145
Forests, WA5–6
Forest Service: WA7
Carcasses of Deer Culled by, WA10
Wildlife Wardens, WA7, WA10
Herd Register, WA273
Hydraulic Fracturing, WA340
Ilex Regeneration Programme, WA342
Implanted Microchips, WA14
Milk Production, WA146
Mourne Herring:
Fishery, WA12
Fishery Quota, WA11–12
Fishery Stocks, WA12
Muntjac Deer, WA9
October Monitoring Round, WA8, WA13
Press Advertising, WA133
Renewable Energy Projects: Assistance, WA8, WA272
Rural Proofing: Legislation, WA143
Rural Support Networks, WA143
Rural White Paper Action Plan, WA15
Scallops, WA13
Schools Milk Scheme: North Down, WA144
Shooting Sports, WA6
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA133–42
Strangford Lough Fishing Fleet, WA274
Stray Animals, WA15
Sustainable Livestock Bill, WA8
Timber Sales, WA4–5
Travel Costs, WA146
Tree Diseases, WA274–5
Waterways:
Crawfordsburn Village, WA10
North Down, WA342
Woodland Cover, WA14

Overend, Mrs Sandra
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements: Economic Strategy, 413
Ministerial Statements
Public expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 45
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Funding, 352
Employment and Learning
Northern Regional College: Magherafelt Campus, 40
Social Development
Fuel Poverty, 343
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 181–2
Universities: Students' Community Background, 328, 329
Written Answers
Finance and Personnel
Civil Service: Equal Pay, WA75

Poots, Mr Edwin
Adjournment
Ambulance Service: Newry and Armagh, 244–6
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 123–4, 128
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 190–2, 192, 193, 193–4, 194, 195, 196
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 137–41, 141, 141–2, 142, 143, 143–4, 144, 144–5, 145, 145–6, 146, 147, 147–8, 148
Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Dementia Strategy, 210, 210–11, 211
DHSSPS: Budget 2011-12, 212, 212–13, 213
Health and Social Care Services:
Commissioning, 209, 210
Review, 207, 208
Hospital Appointments, 211, 211–12, 212
Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust, 208, 209

Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 103–4, 113–14,114–16
Maze Prison Site, 76–7, 77, 77–8, 82, 100
Pat Finucane Case, 166–7, 167, 167–8, 168
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 296–8, 298, 298–9
Written Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
10-day Target for Payment of Invoices, WA212
2001 Munby Ruling, WA400
Air Travel: Costs, WA420
Alcohol Abuse, WA310
Ambulance:
Based in Ballycastle, WA421
Provision in Ballycastle, WA421
Anti-TNF Drugs, WA221
Appeal No: EA/2010/0155, WA209–10
At Risk Register, WA306
Autism Strategy, WA213
Bangor Town Centre: Street Parking, WA89
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust:
Accident and Emergency Services, WA92
Buses, WA81
Business Services Organisation, WA310
Care Homes, WA78, WA79, WA79–80, WA80
Care Homes:
Accidents, WA78, WA80
Misconduct by Staff, WA78
Serious Injury to a Resident, WA79
Care Packages for Children in the Formal Care System, WA307–8
Care System, WA223
Caring for Patients with Pregnancy Loss, WA419
Causeway Hospital:
Admissions, WA93–4
Maternity Services, WA93
Cedar Lodge School, Belfast: Occupational Therapist, WA310–11
Cerebral Angiogram, WA93
Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy Treatment, WA222
Child Order Statistics, WA309
Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, WA312
Children in Care, WA416
Cost of Providing Services, WA398–9
Children Removed from the Care of their Parents, WA213
Clinical Negligence: Claims, WA415
Community Information System, WA84–7, WA88
Community Pharmacies, WA94
Consultants, WA90
Cost of Answering an Assembly Question, WA212
Cost of Prescriptions Issued and Dispensed, WA217, 217–8
Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry: Accident and Emergency Unit, WA79
Dementia Strategy, WA310
Department Spend, WA92
DHSSPS: Joined-up Working, WA311–12
Downe Hospital site, Downpatrick, WA90, WA91
Equality Schemes, WA92
Erne Hospital, Enniskillen:
Old Equipment, WA216
Wage Rate of Staff Required to "Act Up", WA216
Fire and Rescue Service:
Budget, WA308
Cuts, WA216
Firefighters: Hot Fire Training, WA215
Foster Care: Promotion, WA414
Foster Carers, WA413, WA421
Foster Parents, WA414
Free Prescriptions, WA210
Generic Drugs, WA309
Health and Social Care Trust Staff, WA308
Health and Social Care Trusts: Effective Internal Communication, WA217
Health Service: Pay Bill, WA91
Health Unions: Funding, WA220
Homeless Organisations:
Funding, WA215
Support, WA216
Homeless Organisations in Foyle Constituency: Funding, WA216
Hospitals: Accident and Emergency Departments, WA311
Huntingdon's Disease, WA81–2
Inflammatory Bowel Disease, WA223
Intensive Care Units and Neo-natal Units: Staff, WA400–5, WA405–9
Intermediate Care, WA77
Invest to Save Scheme, WA222
Kinship Care, WA395, WA396–7, WA397–8, WA399–400, WA411–12, WA415–16, WA417, WA420
Arrangements, WA415, WA420
Children in, WA420
Foster Assessments, WA420
Pupils: GCSEs, WA413
Kinship Carers, WA412, WA416
Knockmore Primary School, WA414

Marmot Review, WA419
Meals on Wheels Service, WA90, WA421
Mental Health Act: Legislation, WA307
Mental Health Legislation: Police Powers, WA213–14
Minister's Overseas Trips, WA211
Motivate Programme, WA93
MRI Scanner for Clark Clinic, Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, WA214
NHS: Trade Unions, WA311
Occupational Therapists, WA77–8
October Monitoring Round, WA89
Easements, WA212
Funding Allocation, WA220
PARIS System, WA83, WA88
Physiotherapy:
Graduates, WA214–5
Waiting Times, WA89
Podiatry Care, WA309
Post-traumatic Rape Syndrome, WA220
Prescribing Formulary for Drugs: Development of, WA91–2
Prescribing Costs, WA212, WA213
Prescription Charges: Annual Income, WA218
Prescription Drugs, WA312
Prescriptions, WA92
Charges for Dosage Monitoring Systems, WA220
Private Care Homes, WA82, WA83
Protect Life Strategy, WA82
Psychologists: Qualified and Trainee, WA419
Public Consultation on UK Plan for Rare Diseases, WA307
Removal of Sectarian Tattoos, WA214, WA219
Royal College of Physicians' National Sentinel Stroke Audit 2010: Public Report, WA417
Salary of Health Union Leader, WA219
Smoking in Motor Vehicles, WA221
Smoking in Work Vehicles: Fines, WA410–11
Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Funding for Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy, WA219
Speech and Language Therapists, WA418–19
Speech and Language Therapy: Waiting List, WA418
Staffing Arrangements for South West Acute Hospital, WA308
Stroke Units, WA417
Supplier Invoices, WA81
Technology Partner Framework, WA87
The Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations Northern Ireland 2011, WA223
Travel Costs, WA218
Treatment Administered to EU Nationals, WA209
UK Citizenship, WA221–2

Ramsey, Mr Pat
Private Members' Business
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 359, 360
Universities: Students' Community Background, 325–6, 326, 326–7, 327
Written Answers
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Economy: Cross-border Transport, WA299
NI Screen, WA49
Productions, WA283
Environment
EU Directive 2009/113/EC, WA384
Tourism: Built Heritage, WA301
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
2001 Munby Ruling, WA400
Care Packages for Children in the Formal Care System, WA307
Care System, WA223
Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy Treatment, WA222
Children in Care: Cost of Providing Services, WA398
Children Removed from the Care of their Parents, WA213
Foster Carers, WA413
Homeless Organisations:
Funding, WA215
Support, WA216
Homeless Organisations in Foyle Constituency: Funding, WA216
Kinship Care, WA396, WA397, WA399, WA411
Kinship Care Pupils: GCSEs, WA413
Kinship Carers, WA412
Mental Health Legislation: Police Powers, WA213
Psychologists: Qualified and Trainee, WA419
Justice
Visiting Privileges: Members of the Oireachtas, WA228
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Childcare Strategy, WA126
Social Development
Winter Fuel Payment, WA117

Ramsey, Ms Sue
Oral Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Child Poverty, 278

Regional Development
Northern Ireland Water: Advice Leaflet, 283, 283–4
Private Members' Business
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 356–6, 362, 362–3, 363, 367
Universities: Students' Community Background, 335
Written Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Buses, WA81
Community Information System, WA84, WA88
PARIS System, WA83, WA88
Technology Partner Framework, WA87

Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 196
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 182–3, 184
Pat Finucane Case, 171
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Fish Quota Allocations, WA272
Education
Priorities for Youth Document, WA281
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Home Heating Oil Prices, WA288
Invest NI: Unspent Funding, WA47, WA48
Renewable Heat Incentive, WA188
Warm Homes Discount Scheme, WA194
Finance and Personnel
Domestic Properties, WA205
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Consultants, WA90
Downe Hospital Site, Downpatrick, WA90, WA91
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Legislative Programme for the Executive, WA131
Programme for Government, WA131

Robinson, Mr George
Written Answers
Regional Development
Gortcorbies Climbing Lane Project on the A37, WA432

Robinson, Mr Peter
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statement: Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 381–4, 388, 388–9, 391, 392, 393, 393–4, 395, 395–6, 397
Oral Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Budget: October Monitoring Round, 273, 274
Child Poverty, 277
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, 275
Ilex Regeneration Plan, 278
Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, 274, 274–5, 275
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 82, 83–6
Written Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Arm's-length Bodies, WA131
Value for Money Audits, WA339
Asset Management Unit, WA339
Ballykelly:
Former Army Barracks Site, WA3
Former Army Base Site, WA125
Budget Review Group, WA3
Capital Investment Projects: Shortfalls, WA339
Child Poverty, WA125, WA128
Childcare Fund, WA270–1
Childcare Strategy, WA126
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA130
Cost of Equality Schemes, WA129
Executive Office in Brussels, WA1–2
Flags Protocol Review Group, WA125–6
Historical Institutional Abuse: Inquiry, WA269
Junior Ministers, WA130
Legislative Programme, WA129
for the Executive, WA131
Ministerial Subcommittee for Children and Young People, WA129–30
October Monitoring Round, WA2, WA126
Planning Appeals Commission, WA269–70
Programme for Government, WA131
Regeneration of Former Security Sites, WA2
Review of Public Administration, WA4
Social Investment Fund, WA1, WA3, WA131, WA270
Consultation, WA270
Special Advisers, WA127
Staff: Third Level Education Courses, WA127–8
Strategic Investment Board, WA340
Members, WA2
Ten-Year Strategy for Children and Young People, WA129, WA130
United States of America: Links with, WA3–4

Ross, Mr Alastair
Ministerial Statements
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 392
Oral Answers
Social Development
Motability Cars, 344
Private Members' Business
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 369
Universities: Students' Community Background, 329, 331, 331–2, 332
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
World Police and Fire Games, WA358
Education
Modern Language: A Level, WA30
Modern Languages, WA29
Employment and Learning
Modern Language Courses, WA181
Modern Languages, WA176
Qualifications, WA180
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Health Unions: Funding, WA220
Salary of Health Union Leader, WA219

Ruane, Ms Caitríona
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Salmon Conservation, 348
Employment and Learning
Schools: Ballymoney Learning Community, 36
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Unemployment, 160
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Budget: October Monitoring Round, 274
Investment Strategy, 30
Social Development
Boiler Replacement Scheme, 347
Private Members' Business
Maze Prison Site, 74–5
Written Answers
Education
Free School Meals, WA35
Environment
Planning: Wind Farms, WA305

Sheehan, Mr Pat
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Inland Waterways, 65
Language Body, 69
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Funding, 352
Written Answers
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Review of Public Administration, WA4

The Speaker (Mr William Hay)
Assembly Business
Deputy First Minister, 129
Suspension of Standing Orders, 1
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statement
Economic Strategy, 413–14
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 381, 389, 390, 391, 393, 397, 398
Ministerial Statements
Prison Service Review, 1, 6, 7
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 42
North/South Ministerial Council
Inland Waterways, 63
Language Body, 66, 70
Roads and Transport, 131
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Funding, 352
Community Arts: County Fermanagh, 351
Employment and Learning
Labour Relations Agency: Temporary Workers, 39
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Investment Strategy, 31
Social Development, 342, 345
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 185
Education and Skills Authority, 225
Forensic Science Services, 41
Maze Prison Site, 71, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 83, 86
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 354

Spratt, Mr Jimmy
Executive Committee Business
Ministerial Statements
Economic Strategy, 411
Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, 393
Ministerial Statements
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 145
North/South Ministerial Council: Roads and Transport, 130
Prison Service Review, 9
Oral Answers
Justice
Policing Board: Staffing, 217

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Budget: October Monitoring Round, 273–4
Regional Development
Exercise Watermill, 281–2
Question for Urgent Oral Answer
Regional Development
A5 Road Scheme, 285
Written Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
World Pipe Band Championships, WA358

Storey, Mr Mervyn
Adjournment
Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, 125–6, 126, 127
Oral Answers
Employment and Learning
Schools: Ballymoney Learning Community, 36
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Dealing with the Past, 29
Regional Development
Drinking Water, 282–3
Private Members' Business
Community Pharmacies, 112
Education and Skills Authority, 227–8, 228, 229, 234, 238
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Floodbank Adjacent to The Meadows in Ballymoney, WA11
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Ballymoney Library, WA19
Education
In-year Budgetary Position, WA366
Environment
Victims of Domestic Violence within his Department, WA204
Finance and Personnel
Government Contracts: Payments to Subcontractors, WA76
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Causeway Hospital: Admissions, WA93
Cerebral Angiogram, WA93
Regional Development
NSL Services Group, WA244

Swann, Mr Robin
Committee Business
Agriculture: EU Financial Corrections, 263–4, 264
Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Environment, 253
Inland Waterways, 64
Language Body, 68
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Sport: Volunteering, 349
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Tourism: Ulster Scots, 161, 161–2
Finance and Personnel
Rates: Empty Properties, 95, 96
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Social Investment Fund: Consultation, 33
Social Development
Boiler Replacement Scheme, 347
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Department's Independent Panel, WA10, WA341
Assembly Commission
Senate Chamber, WA266
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Council's Annual Support for Organisations Programme, WA354
European Union: Infraction Fines, WA348
Film Tax Credits, WA18
Fisheries Act 1966, WA351
Irish Language Broadcast Fund, WA18
Library Fines, WA21
Lough Neagh
Fish Caught, WA349
Fish Population, WA350
Fishing Nets, WA349
Illegal Netting of Fish, WA349
Public Library Standards, WA21
Sport: Participation, WA357
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund, WA17, WA18
Ulster-Scots Community, WA351
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Energy Regulator, WA380
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Dementia Strategy, WA309
Free Prescriptions, WA210
Prescribing Costs, WA212, WA213
Prescriptions, WA92
Regional Development
Parking Tickets: Departmental Controlled Carpark, Ballymena, WA245
Social Development
Housing Executive Properties: Maintenance Schemes, WA257

Weir, Mr Peter
Assembly Business
Suspension of Standing Orders, 1

Ministerial Statements
North/South Ministerial Council
Environment, 250
Road Safety, 134
Prison Service Review, 7–8
Oral Answers
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DHSSPS: Budget 2011-12, 212
Private Members' Business
Car Tax Renewal, 51, 54, 57, 58, 60–1
Maze Prison Site, 81–2, 82
Planning Enforcement, 202–3, 203, 203–4, 204
Prison Review: Final Report, 308, 310
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Agricultural Wages Board, WA275
Ban on Animals in Circuses, WA142
October Monitoring Round, WA8, WA13
Renewable Energy Projects: Assistance, WA272
Schools Milk Scheme: North Down, WA144
Waterways in North Down, WA342
Woodland Cover, WA14
Assembly Commission
Childcare Voucher Scheme, WA267
Members' Pension Funds, WA122, WA123, WA441
MLA Salaries, WA121
Pension Arrangements for MLAs and Ministers, WA121
Pension Contributions for Members, WA121
Press Officers and Public Relation Officers, WA267–8
Senate Chamber, WA266–7
Staff, WA336–7
Travel Costs, WA122–3
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts in the North Down Constituency, WA359
Community Festivals Fund, WA277, WA356
Library Opening Hours: North Down, WA158
Olympic Sized Swimming Pool in Bangor, WA23
Sharing of Sports Facilities in North Down, WA353
Education
Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, WA281
Capital Budget, WA278
Newbuilds for Schools, WA364
Newbuilds
Lack of Funding, WA170
Priority Order, WA170
Scheduled to Commence by 2015, WA170
Schools: Budget for Newbuilds, WA281
Employment and Learning
Capital Spend Projects for Higher and Further Education, WA183
October Monitoring Round, WA39, WA40
Student Places: Increase in 2012-13, WA182
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
October Monitoring Round: Easements, WA190
Environment
Enforcement Notices Illegal Developments: North Down, WA203
Planning Applications, WA391
Resource Grants, WA60
Road Safety Grants, WA66
Taxi Enforcement, WA385
Taxi Ranks, WA386
Finance and Personnel
October Monitoring Round, WA70, WA205
Public Sector Contracts, WA75
Vacant Domestic Properties, WA208
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Meals on Wheels Service, WA421
October Monitoring Round, WA89
Easements, WA212
Justice
Access to Justice Review, WA313
Report, WA229
Review Team, WA228
Cost of Keeping an Inmate in Prison, WA227
Domestic Violence Offences: Increased Sentences, WA231
Legal Aid System, WA313, WA314
October Monitoring Round, WA96, WA98
Sentence Tariffs: Changes at Westminster, WA425
Small Claims Court, WA427
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
October Monitoring Round, WA2, WA126
Planning Appeals Commission, WA269
Regional Development
Accidents Resulting from Uneven Road Surfaces, WA325
Blue Badges, WA325
Car Parking Charges, WA327
October Monitoring Round, WA111, WA112
Speed Limits, WA326
Social Development
Discretionary Housing Payment, WA265
Gambling Laws, WA264
Halifax Savers Prize Draw, WA266
Jobseeker's Allowance, WA118

October Monitoring Round, WA260
Pension Credit Branch, WA115, WA116
Pension Credit Claimants in North Down, WA262

Wells, Mr Jim
Ministerial Statements
Dementia Services, 192–3
Lissue House Hospital and Forster Green Hospital, 141
Oral Answers
Justice
Alcohol: Minimum Pricing, 213
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 179, 179–80, 180, 185
Mobile Phones: Roaming Charges, 359, 362
Planning Enforcement, 197, 197–9, 199, 203, 204, 205, 221, 222
Prison Review: Final Report, 317, 318
Smoking in Cars Carrying Children, 271, 271–2, 298
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
CAP Reform, WA343
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
NHS: Trade Unions, WA311

Wilson, Mr Sammy
Ministerial Statements
Public Expenditure: 2011-12 October Monitoring, 42–5, 45, 45–6, 46, 46–7, 47, 47–8, 48, 48–9, 49, 50
Oral Answers
Finance and Personnel
EU Structural Funds: East Antrim, 95
EU Financial Transaction Tax, 97, 97–8
Rates
Business Premises, 93, 93–4, 94
Empty Properties, 95–6, 96
Taxation: Retailers, 98
Private Members' Business
Aggregrates Levy, 180, 183–4, 184–5, 185, 186
Written Answers
Finance and Personnel
Air Passenger Duty, WA71
Banks
Lending, WA75
Dormant Accounts, WA75
Belfast Harbour Commissioners: Funds Held by, WA208
Centre of Procurement Expertise, WA72–3
Chairperson or Chief Executive: Arm's-length Bodies, WA69
Civil and Public Servant Salaries, WA204
Civil Service
Equal Pay, WA75
Staff, WA74
Consultancy Firms, WA73
Corporation Tax, WA70
Cost of Answering Assembly Questions, WA74
County Fermanagh: Public Sector Jobs, WA73, WA74
Criminal Injury Compensation, WA205
Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA207–8
Departmental Spend, WA205
Directive 200/35/EC, WA69–70
Divorces, WA207
Domestic Properties, WA205
Energy Efficiency and the Low Carbon Homes Schemes, WA305
Equality Schemes, WA73
EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, WA306
Government Contracts: Payments to Subcontractors, WA76
Invoices for Construction Work, WA69
Land and Property Services, WA395
Jobs, WA71
October Monitoring Round, WA70, WA205
Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit, WA72, WA74
Department of Education, WA76
Public Sector Contracts, WA76
Public Sector Employees, WA206
Rates, WA206, WA208–9
Special EU Programmes Body, WA73
Townland Addresses, WA306
Travel Costs, WA206
Unfunded Pressures Flowing from Inflation, WA207
Vacant Domestic Properties, WA70, WA208

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 24 October 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion – Extension of Sitting

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 24 October 2011 be extended to no later than 7.30pm.

Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - Prison Service Review

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement regarding the Prison Service Review, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Motion - Draft Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the draft Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 be approved.

Minister of the Environment

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion - Appointment to the Regional Chamber of the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities of Europe

Proposed:

That this Assembly appoints Mr Stewart Dickson as its nominee to the Regional Chamber of the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities of Europe.

Mr P Weir
Ms J McCann

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4.2 Motion - Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Paul Frew replace Mr David McIlveen as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; and that Mr Adrian McQuillan replace Mr Paul Frew as a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - Forensic Science Services

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the pressure and backlog in Forensic Science Northern Ireland; further notes the cuts to the Forensic Science Service on the UK mainland and the impact that this is having on Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Justice to provide the necessary resources to ensure that cases requiring forensics are processed efficiently.

Mr J Craig
Mr P Givan
Mr R Newton
Mr D McIlveen

5.2 Amendment

Proposed:

At end insert:

'; and further calls on the Minister to explore the possible development of an all-island framework for forensic science, to ensure that all resources are used to the maximum benefit of the victims of crime and the criminal justice systems both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.'

Mr C McDevitt
Mr A Maginness
Mr C Eastwood

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

6. Question Time

6.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Acting deputy First Minister, Mr John O'Dowd.

6.2 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

7. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion - Forensic Science Services (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Statement - Public Expenditure: 2011-2012 October Monitoring

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement on the outcomes of 2011-2012 October Monitoring Round, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

9. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

9.1 Motion - Car Tax Renewal

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern that people in Northern Ireland are unable to avail of all the car tax renewal methods that are available to people in Great Britain; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward proposals to address this problem.

Mr S Hamilton
Mr P Weir

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

10. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.27pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

24 October 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
19 - 24 October 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- SSA Annual Report on Decision Making and Case Accuracy - 1 January to 31 December 2010 (DSD)
- Financial Auditing and Reporting - General Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland 2011 (NIAO)
- Southern Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts 2009-10 (DE)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- Draft S.R 2011 The Labour Relations Agency (Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures) (Jurisdictions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DEL)
- S.R. 2011/360 The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DHSSPS)
- S.R. 2011/364 The M1/Trunk Road T3 (Motorway Service Area) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/365 The Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DETI)
- S.R. 2011/368 The Social Security (Work-focused Interviews for Lone Parents and Partners) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2011/361 The Waiting Restrictions (Newry) (2011 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/362 The Parking Places on Roads (Castlecaulfield) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/366 The Control of Traffic (Armagh) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

- Consultation on the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (DARD)

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 25 October 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Inland Waterways Sectoral Format

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Inland Waterways sectoral format, held on 12 October 2011, following which she replied to questions.

2.2 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Language Body Sectoral Format

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Language Body sectoral format, held on 12 October 2011, following which she replied to questions.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - Utilisation of the former site of the Maze Prison

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the potential social and economic benefits which the utilisation of former security sites, such as the site of the Maze Prison, can bring to Northern Ireland; notes with concern the proposals to build a 'Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre' at the site; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to develop this site in a way which is practical and inoffensive to victims.

Mr T Elliott
Mr M Nesbitt

3.2 Amendment No.1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Northern Ireland;' and insert:

'acknowledges that the transformation of the Maze/Long Kesh site into a Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre must have due regard to the needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to prioritise this need whilst urgently progressing a development and job creation strategy for the site.'

Mr C Eastwood
Mr A Maginness
Mrs D Kelly

3.3 Amendment No.2

Proposed:

Leave out :

'with concern'.

Mr P Givan
Mr P Weir

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.39pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

4.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Utilisation of the former site of the Maze Prison (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

Amendment No. 1 being put, the Amendment was **made** (Division 1).

Amendment No. 2 was not put.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

5.2 Motion - Community Pharmacies

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put a contingency plan in place to protect pharmacy services in rural and socially disadvantaged areas following the introduction of new funding arrangements.

Mr D McKay
Ms M Boyle

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Mr Jonathan Craig spoke to his topic on the Closure of Dunmurry High School and Knockmore Primary School, including its Special Needs Unit

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.04pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

25 October 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 October 2011
Division

Utilisation of the former site of the Maze Prison - Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Northern Ireland;' and insert:

'acknowledges that the transformation of the Maze/Long Kesh site into a Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre must have due regard to the needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to prioritise this need whilst urgently progressing a development and job creation strategy for the site.'

Mr C Eastwood
Mr A Maginness
Mrs D Kelly

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 63
Noes: 15

Ayes

Mr Agnew, Mr S Anderson, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D Bradley and Mr Eastwood.

Noes

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Copeland and Mr Nesbitt.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
25 October 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules
   (The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 7 November 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 The Speaker informed Members that he had received a letter from the deputy First Minister, dated 31 October 2011, revoking with effect from that date his earlier letter, in which he had designated the Minister of Education to exercise the functions of the Office of deputy First Minister.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport Sectoral Format: Roads and Transport

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport sectoral format: Roads and Transport, held on 21 October 2011, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport Sectoral Format: Road Safety

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport sectoral format: Road Safety, held on 21 October 2011, following which he replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

3.3 Statement - Lissue House and Forster Green Hospital

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding Lissue House and Forster Green Hospital, following which he replied to questions.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion - Murder of Pat Finucane

Following receipt of a valid Petition of Concern (See Appendix 1), under Standing Order 28, Members were informed that the vote on the motion and the amendment would be taken as the first item of business on Tuesday 8 November.

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the British Government's acceptance that there was collusion by the Army, the RUC and the Security Service in the murder of Pat Finucane; recognises that accepting collusion is not sufficient in itself and that the public now needs to know the extent and nature

of that collusion; and calls on the British Government to honour the binding commitment, made by the then British and Irish Governments in the Weston Park Agreement, by establishing a judicial inquiry, as recommended by Judge Cory in 2004, with the power to compel witnesses to give evidence under oath.

Ms M Ritchie
Mr A Maginness
Mr C Eastwood

4.2 Amendment

Proposed:

At end insert:

'; and further calls on the British Government to establish this judicial inquiry within the next three months.'

Mr M McLaughlin
Mr G Kelly
Mr R McCartney

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

5.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Murder of Pat Finucane (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion and the Amendment.

Members were reminded that the Question would be put on the Motion and the Amendment as the first item of business on Tuesday 8 November.

6.2 Motion - Aggregates Levy Rebate

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the imminent danger to the quarrying industry if the EU Commission decides to require a recovery of the Aggregates Levy rebate from 2004; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make urgent representations to the EU President and the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting that no recovery order is made.

Mr P Frew
Mr T Lunn
Mr P McGlone

Mr D Kinahan
Mr B McElduff

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.26pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

7 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Petition of Concern

Motion and Amendment: Murder of Pat Finucane

Date to be debated: 7 NOVEMBER 2011

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly present this Petition of Concern in accordance with Standing Order 28.

- Mr Sydney Anderson
- Mr Jonathan Bell
- Ms Paula Bradley
- Mr Thomas Buchanan
- Mr Gregory Campbell
- Mr Trevor Clarke
- Mr Jonathan Craig
- Mr Sammy Douglas
- Mr Gordon Dunne
- Mr Alex Easton
- Mrs Arlene Foster
- Mr Paul Frew
- Mr Paul Girvan
- Mr Paul Givan
- Mrs Brenda Hale
- Mr Simon Hamilton
- Mr David Hilditch
- Mr William Humphrey
- Mr William Irwin
- Ms Pam Lewis
- Mr Nelson Mccausland
- Mr Ian Mccrea
- Mr David Mcilveen
- Miss Michelle Mcilveen
- Mr Adrian Mcquillan
- The Lord Morrow
- Mr Stephen Moutray
- Mr Robin Newton
- Mr Edwin Poots
- Mr George Robinson
- Rt Hon Peter Robinson
- Mr Alastair Ross
- Mr Jimmy Spratt
- Mr Mervyn Storey
- Mr Peter Weir
- Mr Jim Wells
- Mr Sammy Wilson
- Mr Danny Kennedy
- Mr Michael Copeland

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
25 October - 7 November 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Armagh Observatory and Planetarium 2010-2011 Annual Report and Accounts (DCAL)
- Big Lottery Fund Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (HOC)
- UK Sport Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011 (HOC)
- National Heritage Memorial Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011 (HOC)
- Heritage Lottery Fund Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (HOC)
- National Lottery Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011 (HOC)
- Western Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts 2009-2010 (DE)
- The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Annual Report 2010-2011 (DSD)
- An Inspection of Prisoner Resettlement by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (DOJ)
- Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service Trust Fund Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)
- An Announced Inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre (DOJ)
- Arts Council for Northern Ireland Retention and Disposal Schedule (DCAL)
- Belfast Metropolitan College Annual Report and Financial Statements 2009/10 (DEL)

5. Assembly Reports

- Seventh Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (NIA 19/11-15)
- Managing Criminal Legal Aid (NIA 20/11-15) (Public Accounts Committee)

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/363 The Foyle Area and Carlingford Area (Tagging and Logbook) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (DARD)
- S.R. 2011/367 The Debt Relief Orders (Designation of Competent Authorities) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DETI)

- S.R. 2011/369 The Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DEL)
- S.R. 2011/372 The Further Education Teachers' (Eligibility) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DEL)
- S.R. 2011/373 The Landfill Allowances Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R. 2011/374 The Smoke Control Areas (Authorised Fuels) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R. 2011/376 The Student Fees (Qualifying Courses and Persons) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DEL)
- S.R. 2011/378 The Rates (Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DFP)
- S.R 2011/379 The Road Traffic (Fixed Penalty) (Offences) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R. 2011/380 The Crossbill Place, Lisburn (Footpaths) (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/381 The Lagmore Road, Lisburn (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/383 The Social Fund (Cold Weather Payments) (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)
- S.R. 2011/387 The Planning (2011 Act) (Transitional Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R 2011/388 The Nitrates Action Programme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2011/375 The Local Government (Rates Support Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R. 2011/382 The Parking Places on Roads (Whiteabbey) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/386 (C.28) The Planning (2011 Act) (Commencement No.1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

- Extreme Rainfall: Help for Households (DOE)

8. Consultation Documents

- The Draft Guidance on Councillors' Allowances (DOE)
- Proposed Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (DETI)
- Draft Onshore Renewable Electricity Action Plan and Strategic Environmental Assessment (DETI)
- Consultation on Proposed Increases to Contributions for Members of the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme (NITPS) (DE)

- Consultation on Fire Extinguishers on Motor Vehicles (DOE)

9. Departmental Publications

- Northern Ireland Prison Service Corporate Plan 2011-2015 and Business Plan 2011-2012 (DOJ)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

- Sovereign Grant Act 2011 Chapter 15

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 8 November 2011

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

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Private Members' Business

2.1 Motion - Murder of Pat Finucane (vote on the motion and amendment without debate)

The motion and the amendment were debated on 7 November 2011. A valid Petition of Concern was presented under Standing Order 28 on 7 November 2011 in relation to the motion and amendment. The votes on the motion and amendment were taken on 8 November 2011.

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the British Government's acceptance that there was collusion by the Army, the RUC and the Security Service in the murder of Pat Finucane; recognises that accepting collusion is not sufficient in itself and that the public now needs to know the extent and nature of that collusion; and calls on the British Government to honour the binding commitment, made by the then British and Irish Governments in the Weston Park Agreement, by establishing a judicial inquiry, as recommended by Judge Cory in 2004, with the power to compel witnesses to give evidence under oath.

Ms M Ritchie
Mr A Maginness
Mr C Eastwood

2.2 Amendment

Proposed:

At end insert:

'; and further calls on the British Government to establish this judicial inquiry within the next three months.'

Mr M McLaughlin
Mr G Kelly
Mr R McCartney

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** on a cross-community basis (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community basis (Division 2).

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - Dementia Services in Northern Ireland

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding Dementia Services in Northern Ireland, following which he replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

4. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Motion - Review of Planning Enforcement

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of the Environment to carry out a review of planning enforcement.

Mr J Wells
Mr P Weir
Mr A Easton

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

5.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Review of Planning Enforcement (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6.2 Motion - Education and Skills Authority

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward legislation to establish the Education and Skills Authority within this Assembly session.

Mr T Lunn
Ms A Lo
Mr C Lyttle
Mrs J Cochrane

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Mr Conor Murphy spoke to his topic on Ambulance cover in Newry and Armagh.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.16pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

8 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

8 November 2011
Divisions

Division No. 1

Murder of Pat Finucane - Amendment

Proposed:

At end insert:

'; and further calls on the British Government to establish this judicial inquiry within the next three months.'

Mr M McLaughlin
Mr G Kelly
Mr R McCartney

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 37
Noes: 55

Ayes

Nationalist

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr P Maskey and Mr McCartney.

Noes

Unionist

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Givan and Mr Ross.

Total votes	92	Total Ayes	37	[40.2%]
Nationalist Votes	36	Nationalist Ayes	36	[100%]
Unionist Votes	47	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	1	[11.1%]

The Amendment **fell** (cross-community vote).

Northern Ireland Assembly

8 November 2011
Divisions

Division No. 2

Murder of Pat Finucane - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the British Government's acceptance that there was collusion by the Army, the RUC and the Security Service in the murder of Pat Finucane; recognises that accepting collusion is not sufficient in itself and that the public now needs to know the extent and nature of that collusion; and calls on the British Government to honour the binding commitment, made by the then British and Irish Governments in the Weston Park Agreement, by establishing a judicial inquiry, as recommended by Judge Cory in 2004, with the power to compel witnesses to give evidence under oath.

Ms M Ritchie
Mr A Maginness
Mr C Eastwood

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 45
Noes: 46

Ayes

Nationalist

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Durkan and Mr McDevitt.

Noes

Unionist

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow,

Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Givan and Mr Ross.

Total votes	91	Total Ayes	45	[49.5%]
Nationalist Votes	36	Nationalist Ayes	36	[100%]
Unionist Votes	46	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	9	[100%]

The Motion was **negatived** (cross-community vote).

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
8 November 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/384 The Plant Health (Import Inspection Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)
- S.R. 2011/385 Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 14 November 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Deputy Speaker Mr Dallat in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Public Petition - Future of Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn

Mr Paul Givan was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the future of Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - North South Ministerial Council in Environment Sectoral Format

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Environment sectoral format held on 21 October 2011, following which he replied to questions.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion - EU Financial Corrections to be levied against the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the latest announcement by the European Commission on financial corrections to be levied against the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development; expresses concern about the potential effect on the Executive's Budget; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make a full and urgent report to the Assembly on the extent of the financial corrections, the actions she is taking to address the issue of non-compliance and how, when and by whom, these monies will be repaid.

Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - Banning Smoking in Cars Carrying Children

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the damaging effects of passive smoking; notes that children are particularly exposed to second-hand smoke; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work closely with the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation, in association with a public awareness campaign, to ban smoking in cars carrying passengers under the age of 16.

Mr J McCallister
Mr S Gardiner

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

6. Question Time

6.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson. Junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

6.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

7. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

7.1 A5 Road Scheme

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, replied to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer, tabled by Mr Pat Doherty.

8. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Motion - Banning Smoking in Cars Carrying Children (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8.2 Motion: Prison Review Team Final Report

Proposed:

That this Assembly welcomes the final report of the Prison Review Team; and calls on the Minister of Justice to initiate a plan to ensure that the report's recommendations are implemented and that progress is monitored; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that the appropriate scrutiny and accountability mechanisms are in place.

Mr R McCartney
Ms J McCann
Mr S Lynch

8.3 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Delete all after 'Assembly' and insert:

'notes the publication of the final report of the Prison Review Team; calls on the Minister of Justice to initiate an immediate public consultation on the report; and further calls on the Minister, following the consultation period, to work with the Executive to agree a way forward.'

Mr P Givan
Mr P Weir
Mr S Anderson
Mr J Wells

8.4 Amendment 2

Proposed:

Insert at end:

'and that the implementation process begins without delay and is completed within 12 months.'

Mr A Maginness
Mr C Eastwood

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

Amendment No. 1 being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

Amendment No. 2 being put, the Amendment **fell** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 2).

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.14pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

14 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 November 2011
Division 1

Prison Review Team Final Report - Amendment 1

Proposed:

Delete all after 'Assembly' and insert:

'notes the publication of the final report of the Prison Review Team; calls on the Minister of Justice to initiate an immediate public consultation on the report; and further calls on the Minister, following the consultation period, to work with the Executive to agree a way forward.'

Mr P Givan
Mr P Weir
Mr S Anderson
Mr J Wells

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 39
Noes: 45

Ayes

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Mr McQuillan.

Noes

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Mr McMullan.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 November 2011
Division 2

Prison Review Team Final Report - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly welcomes the final report of the Prison Review Team; and calls on the Minister of Justice to initiate a plan to ensure that the report's recommendations are implemented and that progress is monitored; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that the appropriate scrutiny and accountability mechanisms are in place.

Mr R McCartney
Ms J McCann
Mr S Lynch

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 45
Noes: 39

Ayes

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Mr McMullan.

Noes

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr S Anderson and Mr McQuillan.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
9 - 14 November 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- The Sports Council for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2010 (DCAL)
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2009 (DE)
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust Annual Report 2010-2011 (DHSSPS)
- Prisoner Ombudsman for NI Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL)
- Department of Justice (NI) Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL)
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL)
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust Annual Accounts Charitable Trust Funds for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/389 The Insolvency Practitioners and Insolvency Account (Fees) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DETI)
- S.R. 2011/390 The Insolvency (Fees) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DETI)
- S.R. 2011/394 The Ballyrobin Road (Route C28), Templepatrick (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/395 The Rates (Payments by Owners by Agreement) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DFP)
- S.R. 2011/396 The Legal Aid in Criminal Proceedings (Costs) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

- EU Commission Proposals for Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reform Post 2013 (DARD)

9. Departmental Publications

- UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy 2011 (DHSSPS)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

- Coinage (Measurement) Act 2011 - Chapter 17
- Armed Forces Act 2011 – Chapter 18
- Pensions Act 2011 – Chapter 19

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 15 November 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Private Members' Business

2.1 Motion - Disparity in Community Background in Students Attending University

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the disparity in the number of students from a Protestant background attending universities in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to explore why this is the case and to bring forward a strategy to address the issue.

Mr G Campbell
Mr A McQuillan

2.2 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'notes' and insert:

'the current background of students attending universities in Northern Ireland; calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to take all appropriate measures to ensure that this balance reflects the relevant cohort of the population; and further calls on the Minister to work with the Minister of Education to address barriers to students accessing higher education.'

Mr T Lunn
Mr C Lyttle
Ms A Lo
Mr K McCarthy

2.3 Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out:

'with concern'

Mr P Ramsey
Mrs D Kelly
Mr C McDevitt

Debate ensued.

Amendment No. 1 being put, the Amendment fell (Division 1).

Amendment No. 2 being put, the Amendment fell without division.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

3.2 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

4. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Motion - Roaming Charges

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the importance of affordable telecommunication costs to achieving economic recovery; welcomes the recent reductions in roaming charges across Europe; further welcomes the European Commission's plans to abolish roaming charges by 2015; and calls for the immediate introduction of an all-Ireland telecommunications tariff to expedite this objective.

Mr P Flanagan
Mr D McKay
Ms S Ramsey

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

4.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after '2015;' and insert:

' and calls on the mobile network operators to abolish roaming charges in advance of 2015; and further notes that regulation of telecommunications on a UK-wide basis is key to a competitive Northern Ireland marketplace.'

Mr R Newton
Mr S Moutray
Mr G Dunne
Mr P Frew

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was made without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

5. Adjournment

Mr Alban Maginness spoke to his topic on Housing at the Girdwood Barracks site in North Belfast.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.10pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

15 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

15 November 2011
Division 1

Disparity in Community Background in Students Attending University - Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'notes' and insert:

'the current background of students attending universities in Northern Ireland; calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to take all appropriate measures to ensure that this balance reflects the relevant cohort of the population; and further calls on the Minister to work with the Minister of Education to address barriers to students accessing higher education.'

Mr T Lunn
Mr C Lyttle
Ms A Lo
Mr K McCarthy

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 33
Noes: 58

Ayes

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs Cochrane and Mr Lyttle.

Noes

Mr Allister, Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lewis, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Buchanan and Mr McQuillan.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
15 November 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2011/392 The Prohibition of Traffic (Lower Ormeau, Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/393 The Prohibition of Traffic (The Mount and Willowfield, Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

- Review of DCAL's Arms Length Bodies (DCAL)

8. Consultation Documents

- The "EC Roadworthiness Directive" – Proposed Changes to the MOT Test (DOE)

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Thursday 17 November 2011

The Assembly met at 11.00am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

The Speaker confirmed that the Plenary sitting had been convened following receipt of a valid notice from the First Minister and deputy First Minister, under Standing Orders, for the purpose of oral statements.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - draft Programme for Government and draft Investment Strategy

The First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson, and the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a joint statement regarding the draft Programme for Government and the draft Investment Strategy, following which they replied to questions.

3.2 Statement - draft Economic Strategy

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, made a statement regarding the draft Economic Strategy, following which she replied to questions.

4. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 2.05pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

17 November 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
16 - 17 November 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Accounts of the Trust Funds held by the Western Health and Social Care Trust for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland - Reaching out to the whole community (OFMDFM)
- Public Prosecution Service (NI) Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL)
- Invest Northern Ireland Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/397 The Fodder Plant Seeds (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2011/400 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Strabane) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/401 The Roads (Speed Limit) (No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

- Consultation on the Draft Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (DARD)

9. Departmental Publications

- The Transfer of Former Military and Security Sites to the Northern Ireland Executive (NIAO)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications